

TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

CONSECRATED CELIBACY

THEOLOGY OF VIRGINAL CHASTITY

Liguory Noronha

BRAHMACARYA AND CHRISTIAN VIRGINITY

G. M. Dhalla

VIRGINITY AND MARRIAGE

Joseph Thekkinedath

CELIBACY WITHOUT PLAY ?

Patricia Kinsey

CONSECRATED CELIBACY AND FRIENDSHIP

Felix Podimattam

A CHALLENGE FOR PRIESTS : WHAT SISTERS EXPECT OF THEM ?

Dolores Marston

BOOK REVIEW

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JEEVADHARA

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The Fullness of Life

CONSECRATED CELIBACY

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Editorial

Problems related to celibacy have for some time now been in the forefront of discussion. It is not our purpose to add to this discussion. In fact we prescind from the controversial topic of institutional celibacy. We are here concerned with charismatic or consecrated celibacy, a celibacy that is freely embraced by those who have a special vocation for it.

What we intend to do here is to try to explain some of the problems connected with its doctrine and practice. In a single issue of a periodical of this kind every aspect of the topic cannot be treated.

Liguory Noronha sets the tone of the issue by presenting in his paper the current theology of consecrated celibacy. G. M. Dhalla, in her article, proceeds to establish the relationship between Christian virginity and Hindu Brahmacharya. The ecumenical import of such a study should be evident. Marriage and virginity resemble each other closely because both are concerned with the full human development of men and women. The difference between them consists in the particular kind of commitment each implies. Joseph Thekkinedath tries to highlight this point in his study. It is easy enough to see how marriage can achieve the creative purpose of human fulfilment, but because of a negativistic emphasis on consecrated celibacy as a state of renunciation and sacrifice, there has been in some cases at least a stunting of human development in priestly and religious life. If we do not wish our priests and religious to be truncated or diminished personalities, there must be a return to the joy of celibate life, and human love must be given its rightful place in

it. This is emphasized in the articles of Patricia Kinsey and of the Editor of this issue of *Jeevadhara*. Finally, Dolores Marston poses a challenge to priests to rise to their high vocation by living up to the expectations of others, especially of reverend sisters.

It is hoped that a perusal of this issue of *Jeevadhara* will lead the readers to a better understanding and appreciation of consecrated celibacy and to a more joyful living of it by those who have espoused it.

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Felix Podimattam

Theology of Virginal Chastity

Introduction:

At the outset of this study, a word should be said on the terms 'virginity', 'celibacy', 'perfect chastity or continence'. Each term has overtones of its own. Continence is rather negative, mainly denoting abstinence from the use of matrimony. It is, therefore, insufficient to express the attitude of loving dedication which must animate Christian 'continence'. Celibacy would be rather too broad a term, for it refers also to a social condition which may have no religious bearing at all. One may remain a celibate out of selfishness or because of circumstances. Christian 'celibacy' to have any Christian value, must be dedicated and willingly accepted; otherwise it is lifeless. 'Virginity' is a traditional term in the Catholic Church, but it has a feminine ring and its use in masculine contexts sounds clumsy. 'Perfect chastity', which is also a traditional phrase, can be misleading, since it could wrongly convey the impression that married life is 'imperfect'. The term 'virginal chastity' is preferable.

I

Nature of Virginal Chastity

This is a specific manner of sexual fulfilment. The 'virgin,' like the married person, is seeking to fulfil himself or herself precisely as a man or as a woman. There is no question of virginity's implying a denial of sexuality; a running away from it or a refusal to undertake the task of cultivating it. Marriage and virginity are alike in this, that both are concerned with the full sexual development of men and women. They differ only in the kind of commitment which they imply. The married person seeks fulfilment through a unique and, to that extent, exclusive love of another. The married person seeks to show forth Christ to the world by his or her dedicated love of a partner, of the children whom they undertake to bring into being, and of those who form the family circle. The 'virgin', on the other hand, seeks

to fulfil himself not by this unique dedication to one but rather by a total and complete dedication to all men, usually of course in some specific area of service determined by his specific vocation. Marriage is meant to be creative of human personality. So also virginity is a specific manner of fulfilling oneself. A virginity which tends to frustrate anything good in the human person would obviously be defective.¹

A. Misconceptions regarding virginal chastity

1. Virginity does not consist in mere celibacy

Virginity is not to be confused with bachelorhood or spinsterhood. There is a misunderstanding even among Christians that celibacy as such is a virtue and is better than marriage. These people fail to perceive that Our Lord did not recommend or give his blessing to every kind of celibacy. In fact, he distinguished three different kinds of celibacy. Some are incapacitated for marriage by nature; some have had to submit to their condition involuntarily through the action of others; others willingly accept celibacy for the sake of 'the kingdom'.

Renunciation of marriage is neither a virtue nor a merit when it has been forced upon one by fate or by circumstances beyond one's control. Marriage renounced in order to avoid its inconveniences and responsibilities is not virginity. Many a man would marry, but he prefers not to lose his freedom; he shirks the duties which marriage involves. This is not the state our Lord praised: still less did he praise the attitude of those who refrain from marriage because they deliberately despise it.² According to Bernard Häring, Christian marriage is much more exalted than celibacy which is not motivated by consecration to God, more exalted than the single state which is due to external inescapable necessity or to a morally inferior motive. Celibacy motivated by exaggerated passion for liberty, or by fear of sacrifices, implies a deficiency.³

1. Fergal O'Connor, "Sexuality, Chastity, and Celibacy" *Doctrine and Life*, 18 (1968) pp. 134-135.
2. August Adam, *The Sixth Commandment*, Cork, 1966, pp. 99-100.
3. B. Häring, *The Law of Christ*, III pp. 381-382.

A man is justified in abstaining from marriage only when he makes up for the renunciation by some other service to his fellow-men. It is a great mistake to imagine that the Catholic Church attaches a higher importance to mere celibacy than to marriage. The only kind of celibacy Our Lord acknowledged is that which is undertaken voluntarily for the kingdom of God; for the sake of Christ in whom the kingdom of heaven came to us in bodily form. The kingdom of heaven, as August Adam observes, is the communion of the faithful in love. To remain unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of God therefore means a deliberate choice of celibacy because it leaves a person more free to devote his life to the service of others. When a missionary renounces family life in order to bring the light of the Gospel to non-Christians, when a sister voluntarily renounces the joys of motherhood so that she may mother friendless orphans that is service for the kingdom of God.⁴ But there is no merit in a bachelor's choosing to remain single out of pure selfishness.

Dietrich Von Hildebrand confirms the same idea when he writes that mere celibacy, the non-exercise of sex simply as such, is not a merit. The man, for example, who remains a celibate because he fails to find a wife is not, for that reason, better than a good husband. On the contrary, as compared with a married man, he is of lower worth because his state lacks the value inherent in marriage as a mystery of created love.⁵

Virginité implies no antipathy to the body as such, for it is to be lived in the body. When the virginal way of life is praised as a victory over the body, or as the full expression of the human spirit, this manner of thinking is the result of un-Christian tendencies. Christian virginité does not imply any contempt for the senses or any rejection of what is sexual. It would be a gross error to see in a person's lack of sensuality or even lack of sexuality the real or even appropriate basis of virginité.

4. August Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

5. D. Von Hildebrand *In Defence of Purity*, Chicago, 1970, p. 89.

2. Virginity does not consist in the physical integrity of the body

Virginity is a moral and not a physical quality. No one is naturally a 'virgin'. Virginity is something that we achieve, for authentic virginity is chastity, and the measure of our chastity is the extent to which we have personalized our sexuality. The important question for virginity is to what extent we have integrated our sexuality with our love. The essence of virginity is love.⁶

According to Ignace Lepp, virginity as a physiological fact has no moral significance whatsoever. The Church honours numerous saints as virgins and martyrs who were not virgins in the physical sense of the term. Many of the early saints, who were violated by their executioners are honoured as virgins, nor would any Christian refuse this title in the moral and religious sense to the Belgian religious who were violated by the Congolese soldiers. On the other hand, from this point of view it would be impossible to regard as virgins those modern young women who indulge in various forms of eroticism while taking great care to safeguard their physical virginity, for this in no way indicates moral superiority but simply reveals that they are still victims of ancient taboos.⁷

Bernard Häring criticizes those who lay stress on bodily integrity. What is decisive beyond all else for virginity is the love of Christ now possessed by them: the total love of the master. For this reason those who have been purified in penance and in the fire of heavenly love are in a true sense more virginal than those undisturbed persons whose bodies are intact, but whose hearts are not yet filled with undivided love for Christ.⁸

6. Louis Evelyn, *Lovers in Marriage*, London, 1969, pp. 35-36.

7. Ignace Lepp, *The Authentic Morality*, New York, 1967, pp. 183-184).

8. B. Häring, *The Law of Christ*, III, p. 386).

B. Positive dimensions of virginal chastity**I. 'Virginity' is celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God**

A freely chosen celibacy for God's sake constitutes virginity. Virginity is, in the first place, freely chosen. As Dietrich von Hildebrand points out, a merely external celibacy, which has not been deliberately adopted, or which is felt as an unwelcome and painful trial, has as little to do with virginity as outward poverty forcibly imposed has to do with poverty freely chosen. No doubt a person who is a celibate against his or her will can also be chaste, but such chastity is distinct from virginal chastity. A renunciation of marriage does not in itself imply a positive choice of virginity, i. e., a determination to belong to God in a special fashion. Even when the circumstances of her life have brought a woman to the conclusion that she is called by God to celibacy and this conviction leads her to renounce matrimony, this is not necessarily an explicit choice of virginity, in the positive sense. The renunciation, indeed, alters her attitude to sex as compared with that of a chaste person before marriage, inasmuch as it signifies an inward exclusion. It is, however, not a profession of virginity, but a simple acceptance of it, as a man might accept poverty which he had not freely chosen, but which God has imposed upon him. Even though resignation to God's will possesses a special value, this in no way differs from what is involved in every submissive acceptance of a cross which God lays upon us. In such a case no new and distinctive value attaches to the fact of celibacy. There is simply the value which submission to God's will brings with it. The same value, for example, is present when an unhappy marriage is borne submissively as the dispensation of God's providence.⁹

We may consider another case. A person takes celibacy as her normal condition, because there has been no thought of marriage. Here celibacy is in a certain sense deliberately chosen, as it was not in the previous instance; but it has nothing to do with virginity. It is not chosen for the sake of its profound significance. It is simply the effect of a purely natural inclination and as such represents an absence of value as compared with

9. D. Von Hildebrand, *In Defence of Purity*, Chicago, 1270, pp. 91-92.

marriage. It is the mere consequence of a defect, inasmuch as the subject is incapable of the high value which marriage represents. No greater good occupies the heart in place of it. Such a person may be chaste, but celibacy, here, is not virginity.¹⁰

For celibacy to be 'virginal chastity', it must be chosen for God's sake and for no other reason and, moreover, in order thereby to belong to Him in a special way. This we call consecrated chastity. It is not sufficient that it is accepted as willed by God; it must be referred to Him far more directly; it must be actually consecrated to God. It is truly consecrated when, in accordance with the words of our Lord, it is freely chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Only the will of the individual who, out of love, gives himself more closely to Christ, is able to transmute a merely physical celibacy into 'virginity'.¹¹ The fact of consecration to God is of decisive importance for virginity.

2. Virginity as a special brideship with Christ

The peculiar significance of virginity is unintelligible from the purely natural point of view, for it consists simply in a new form of union with Jesus. The virgin is a special 'bride' of Christ. Virginity establishes a bridal relationship with Christ which essentially transcends the bridal relationship belonging to every member of Christ's Mystical Body.¹²

What is the nature of this special bridal relationship? Dietrich Von Hildebrand explains its nature admirably. He begins by stating that every member of Christ's Mystical Body is a bride of Jesus. Jesus is the bridegroom of every person who is a member of His Mystical Body. The supreme and most intimate bond between a person and Jesus, the nuptial love and union with the Incarnate Word, is, as such, confined to no special vocation. Every baptized person can attain it with the help of grace. A bride's love for Christ and the supremely close intimacy with Him belong as much to St Elizabeth or St Catherine of Genoa as to St Catherine of Sienna or St Theresa, to St Louis as much as to St Francis. Nevertheless there is a state of life which

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

stands in a special relation of wedlock with Christ, the state of 'virginity'.¹³

Why is the 'virgin', in an entirely new sense, Christ's bride? Von Hildebrand is not satisfied with the answers that are usually given. One is that the more strictly a person represents a constituent part of the Church, the more fully is the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church realized in him. The priest and the religious, namely those who live a life of 'virginity', are constituents of the Church in a stricter sense than the other members of Christ's Mystical Body. Therefore the nuptial relationship to Jesus is more strictly realized in them. This idea can be questioned in the light of the teachings of Vatican II. Even granting that it is correct, this reply only removes the problem a step further. It may be asked: why does 'virginity' possess this significance for those members of Christ's Mystical Body who are in the stricter sense representative of the Church?¹⁴

Von Hildebrand gives his own explanation. The relationship between Christ and every member of his Mystical Body is termed 'marriage'. In the objective sense every member of the Mystical Body is a 'bride' of Christ, including baptized infants. But at the subjective experiential level there is a vast difference from member to member. If we look into the special relationship of the individual to Jesus as experienced by him, we observe that this relationship, as possessed by the majority of the living members of His Body, is far less intimate than anything to which the term 'marriage' could be fittingly applied. And this is quite understandable if we look into the mystery of sex. It also helps us to understand the unique and mysterious factor of 'virginity', on which the 'wedding' with Christ is based. In a certain sense sex is the secret of every human being. The disclosure of this secret to another and the delivery of it to that other in wedlock constitutes a self-surrender and self-donation of a wholly unique kind. On earth, it is not in our power, without the co-operation of the body, to give our heart to another. In no other relationship between persons, is there anything analogous to the surrender of self effected when one lays bare to another the secret of one's own person -

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

sex – and admits another to share in it. By the offering of sex and by it alone can that donation of self be made entirely as a complete unity, and this constitutes between the partners a nuptial bond, a union of a wholly unique kind.¹⁵

The act which places this sexual secret in the hands of Jesus, inviolate and sealed for ever, denotes a self-surrender to Him, and a 'marriage' with Him which corresponds to the matrimonial self-surrender to a creature. Since Jesus is a heavenly bridegroom, marriage with Him must be completely different from earthly wedlock': a purely spiritual union. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental feature really common to both. That supreme self-surrender of the entire person which can be given to a fellow creature by marriage alone, is here made to Jesus by the vow never to disclose this secret to anyone: the radical and final renunciation, for His love, of all exercise of sex, by the cutting of oneself off in some manner from the world, to live for Him alone. Only those who have grasped the utterly central position occupied by sex, its depth, and the mystery that invests it, are in a position to grasp the mysterious factor that makes virginity a wedlock with Christ. The final renunciation of the exercise of sex made by the 'virgin' shifts the psychological centre of gravity in an altogether unparalleled fashion. A centre within oneself is, in a sense, set free and disclosed to Christ alone and as distinct from surrender to a fellow creature which is indissolubly bound up with the disclosure of sex. By the solemn and final renunciation for Jesus' sake, of that unique gift of self which one makes to a creature in marriage, by the determination to keep one's sexual secret perpetually hidden, indeed, and to surrender that secret inviolate into the hands of Jesus, sex is, in a sense, abolished and the centre of gravity in that person raised to a level specifically in contact with Him. In this case – and in this case alone is a radical transcendence of sex affected. By this act of surrender the 'virgin' gives her secret to Jesus and marries Him in a fashion really analogous to earthly wedlock, though her marriage is purely spiritual and involves no sort of physical realization of sex. Though the physical fact of sex does not cease to exist, or temptations to unchastity excluded, Christ's

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

'bride' in virtue of wedlock with Him, objectively transcends sex.¹⁶

We have, now, some notion of why 'virginity' alone constitutes a marriage with Christ, in a special sense. There is not simply the solemn promise of something to God, but a betrothal in which the person is the subject of disposal, in fact, a genuine marriage. It is possible to be the bride of Christ in the interior subjective sense without being wedded to Christ in this objective fashion, just as a man can feel wedded love towards a woman without being actually married to her. Marriage is the specific external embodiment of this love, inasmuch as it completes the supreme interior communion of hearts by an exterior and formal union and creates an objective indissoluble bond whose worth and validity are guaranteed against caprice and are independent of love's ebb and flow. In like manner the vow of the virgin is the organic expression of love and the means by which the interior bond is projected into the external sphere; it creates, in fact, a new tie between the virgin and God, objective, irrevocable, and of a peculiar intimacy.¹⁷

II

The Value of Virginal Chastity

A. No exaggeration of the value of virginity

Every Christian, whatever his state of life may be, is called by the grace of Christ to follow Him. Christian marriage is a genuine way of life in Christ for everyone who has the call to it and truly seeks to serve Christ and His kingdom in it. However, the state of 'virginity' manifests uniquely, in the objective order, more than any other state of life, that the only valid meaning of life is undivided devotion to the imitation of Christ. By its very nature 'virginity' focusses attention on the meaning of life as total dedication to following Christ. 'Virginity' is not to be measured by the trials and hardships involved in renunciation. Its worth lies rather in the greatness of love for Christ and for one's fellowmen.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-136.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

Too much Christian propaganda in favour of 'virginity' has been made not because 'virginity' was thought holy but because many Christians believed that sex is degrading and prevents a person from attention to God. A great deal of pseudo-psychological nonsense has been written about the tendency of sexual activity even among the married to make the spirit lethargic and to discourage prayer. It has been said, distorting St Paul's meaning, that married people love God through each other, but the virgin loves God alone. All this does not help a Christian to see the real glory and value of 'virginity'.

Many authors and preachers still exalt 'virginity' to a degree that makes those who do not practise it feel inferior and guilty as if they were second-class christians. By their mode of expression they give the impression that marriage is a makeshift in life, to which the great majority of men and women have had to have recourse because they would find it extremely difficult to remain chaste in other circumstances. Marriage is a refuge for those who are so constituted sexually that they cannot control themselves. Married people seemed to have a certain inferiority in their nature which makes it impossible for them to aspire after the higher state of 'virginity'. There are married saints, but writers of spiritual biographies were careful to point out that they sanctified themselves because they followed the example of the monks!

Dietrich Von Hildebrand writes that a life of 'virginity' is not of itself more meritorious, for merit does not depend on the state in which we are but on the love that animates our life. The holiness of an individual gives God far greater glory than the state of virginity as such. Holiness is the one supreme goal common to all alike, by which is meant the real and complete transformation of a man in and by the power of Christ. Interior wedlock with Christ and the highest measure of supernatural love for Him and for all creatures, are the essential aims set before all men without exception and are the mission of every human being, whose accomplishment gives God greater glory than any other state of life, however exalted, or the act of heroism by which that state is chosen. Holiness alone counts with God. The holier we are, the more does our entire personality share in the divine life of Christ and glorify God with

and in Him. However exalted the rank of 'consecrated virginity', what St Paul says of the gift of prophecy and the faith which removes mountains is still applicable: the man who possesses it without love is nothing.¹⁸

August Adam's views are similar. The only thing that has any merit in the sight of God is the amount of love that goes into any act we perform. The measure of love with which we serve God, whether it be in wedlock or in virginity, is the only criterion of the moral value of that service. Therefore 'virginity' is meritorious before God simply on the grounds of its being an act of will, but only in so far as it has sprung from an ardent love of God and is a continued expression of that love. It follows therefore, that a marriage entered into with honest love is more worthy than a loveless virginity. Thus many fathers and mothers who bring up their children devotedly in the face of great hardships, stand higher in the esteem of God, and will receive a greater reward in heaven, than many priests and religious who have withdrawn from the world in order to be undisturbed in seeking their own salvation. If even faith that can move mountains, even the giving away of all one's possessions to the poor, is without love, but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, a loveless virginity surely also means nothing in the sight of God.¹⁹

Our Lord was a 'virgin'. The Gospel evidence is decisive on this point. Aloysius Kedl sees only one valid reason and explanation for the 'virginity' of Jesus. He remained a 'virgin' because such an existence was required of Him by the Father who sent Him. 'Virginity', for Him, was in absolute harmony with Incarnation. For Jesus, to be celibate was part and parcel of His work and mission and message. It belonged to "the things of My Father" with which He was constantly concerned.²⁰

18. D. Von Hildebrand, *In Defence of Purity*, p. 139.

19. August Adam, *The Sixth Commandment*, Cork, 1966, pp. 100-101.

20. Aloysius Kedl, "In the Footsteps of Christ" - *Consecrated Celibacy, A Publication of the Canadian Religious*, Ottawa, 1971, p. 27-28.

The excellence of the 'virginity' of our Lord and of our Lady did not consist in some sort of superior "purity" but in their loyalty to a higher vocation.²¹ Jesus chose 'virginity' not because marriage was below His dignity, but because it was the will of his Father. He chose to be celibate "on account of the Kingdom". According to Kedl, this means not so much "because of the kingdom", or "for the sake of the kingdom", or "to be free for the kingdom", or "on account of the kingdom". It really means "in view of the kingdom", or "in order to be in harmony with the kingdom". Because life in the perfect stage of the kingdom to come is celibate, life in the initial stage of the kingdom already come, must already reflect and anticipate this. Jesus made this abundantly clear when, on one occasion, He refuted an objection which the Sadducees had made against the resurrection of the body. At the resurrection men and women do not marry (Mt 22: 30). By choosing to be celibate, then, Jesus chose a way of life that was truly prophetic. His virginity pointed as a sign to the type of life which was in store for everybody in the future Kingdom; and it was already a kind of beginning, an anticipation here and now of that same type of life. Jesus came to inaugurate the life of the resurrection. He came to proclaim, to describe, to initiate, the Kingdom among us. Because in the life of the resurrection marriage, procreation, and sexual union will no longer have any meaning, or purpose (and thus even those who married in this world will be celibate in the next), Jesus undertook to live among us as a celibate man.²²

B. The preeminence of 'virginity'

The Church has always taught that the state of virginity is in some sense superior to the state of marriage. How are we to understand this teaching? To avoid misunderstanding it is to be noted that we are not here considering persons who are married or persons who are 'virgins' but marriage and 'virginity' as states of life. While it is maintained that the state of 'virginity' is in some sense superior to the state of marriage, there is no implication that 'virgins' are superior to married people. As has

21. Cardinal Suenens, *Love and Control*, Westminster, Md., 1964, pp. 40-50.

22. Kedl, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-34.

been noted above, every Christian, whatever his state of life, is called by the grace of Christ to follow Him. Christian marriage is a genuine way of life in Christ for everyone who has the call to it. However, the state of 'virginity' manifests uniquely, in the objective order, more than any other state of life, that the only valid meaning of life is undivided devotion to the imitation of Christ.

1. 'Virginity' as a state of availability for 'the kingdom'

As has been pointed out elsewhere, in this article, sex is the divided reflection, at creature-level, of the fruitfulness which God has in unity. Whether forces of sex be resolved in one person as in 'virginity' or between two as in marriage, the aim is always more abundant life, natural or supernatural. God's life is trinitarian and essentially fruitful. God the Father generates the Son and from the Father and the Son proceeds the Holy Spirit. God's life is unthinkable without the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit. His life, therefore, is an act of generation and procession, in a word, an act of fruitfulness. God is fruitfulness itself.

Man is the image of God and as such has to reflect God's fruitfulness if his life is to have any meaning. Man's perfection consists in his participating in the life of God. Now God's life, as we have seen, is supremely fruitful and as a consequence man's life too must be fruitful and fecund. The more so it is, the more God-like he becomes.

Fruitfulness, or fecundity, is of two kinds: natural-corporal and supernatural-spiritual. Natural fecundity consists in transmitting natural life, and supernatural fecundity in transmitting supernatural life. Natural fecundity is a reflection, at the human level, of the fullness of supernatural fecundity in God, and this natural fecundity is revealed in marriage. Marriage, however, is not restricted to natural fecundity alone. It promotes supernatural fecundity directly and primarily in the family group, and indirectly and secondarily, in the entire human family. Marriage directly and primarily achieves the over-all perfection, natural and supernatural, of the spouses and their children, and indirectly and secondarily, that of the whole human family. Marriage directly achieves the natural and supernatural perfection of the

spouses and their children by establishing a limited community of love and salvation. It achieves, indirectly, the natural and the supernatural perfection of the whole human race by extending the sphere of natural and supernatural influence beyond the limits of the family. The family is the unity of human society and promotion of the family amounts to the promotion of society.

'Virginity', or supernatural fecundity, is the participation, at the human level, of the fullness of the supernatural fecundity in God. 'Virginity' is restricted to supernatural fecundity alone. It promotes directly and primarily, the supernatural perfection of the entire human family, and secondarily, its natural perfection. Supernatural fecundity consists in transmitting divine life, i.e., grace and salvation, to others. God alone can, in the strict sense of the word, transmit His life to others, and therefore He alone, strictly speaking, is supernaturally fecund. Man is called to be the bearer and mediator of divine life to others. He does not transmit his own supernatural life to his brethren but merely acts as bearer of God's life to them. Consequently his spiritual parenthood is analogous. All that he has to do is to be available to God's action of transmitting His life. His supernatural fecundity consists, therefore, in a certain availability to God's salvific action in favour of the entire human family. This availability is vertical towards God and horizontal to mankind where it consists in communion with mankind.

Supernatural fecundity consists in vertical availability to God and horizontal availability to man, or in union with God and communion with mankind. As regards vertical availability, or union with God, marriage and 'virginity' are on the same level. Sanctity and union with God are the monopoly of neither marriage nor 'virginity'. Both are states of perfection in the theological sense of the word. But when we pass on to the horizontal availability, or communion with mankind, the question is different. Here 'virginity' goes far beyond marriage both affectively and effectively. The horizontal availability of marriage is oriented directly to a particular family group, while that of 'virginity' is to the entire human family. Married people, by their state, are obliged to dedicate their life and efforts to the perfection of their family in the first place and only in the second place, to the entire human community. 'Virgins', on the contrary, are

obliged by the state of their life to dedicate all their love and efforts to the over-all perfection, mainly supernatural, of the entire human family. Herein consists, the superiority of 'virginity' over marriage. In brief, the value of 'virginity' consists in its supernatural fecundity. Its superiority over marriage consists in its being supernaturally more fecund²³.

Besides the 'virgin' is more 'available' for the kingdom, for the unmarried state leaves a person more free to devote his life to the service of God's kingdom. Certainly marriage is a service for the kingdom of God. This sacrament ensures the survival of the species through responsible love and unselfish devotion. It also ensures that the Church on earth shall have successive generations of persons. But there are many other tasks in the Kingdom of God for the carrying out of which family ties would be too great a distraction. There will always be, in the world, forsaken children who need mothering; there will always be the sick who require a helping hand and loving care; there will always be, in the Church, helpless people bereft of joy, people who have lost their bearings on life's journey and need others to put them on the right road again, shouldering their burden with unselfish love. There will always be married people who have need of an example of self-discipline and selflessness if their own marriage is not to disintegrate. These people can be catered to only by 'virgins'.

The whole argument in favour of the pre-eminence of 'virginity' may be briefly stated as follows: Man's life ought to be fruitful because God's life is so. Supernatural fruitfulness is superior to natural fruitfulness. 'Virginity' is more conducive to supernatural fruitfulness than marriage.

'Virginity' is not sterile but eminently fecund. It renounces natural fecundity not because this latter is something low or imperfect but because it has a tendency to limit horizontal availability towards the entire human family. In our Lady we have an admirable combination of natural and supernatural

23. Felix M. Podimattam, from his unpublished manuscripts: *Sexual Ethics*. (His notes are liberally used to write this article.)

fecundity. In her, natural fecundity was the door to supernatural fecundity. She is the supernatural mother of mankind precisely because she is the natural mother of the Saviour, the source of all supernatural fruitfulness.

2. 'Virginity' as an easier way to freedom

The state of 'virginity' is more conducive to the imitation of Christ in the sense that there is need for less preoccupation with regard to means of support. A married man spends much time and effort in planning his economy. Economic security frees 'virgins' from many preoccupations. They have not got to worry unduly about markets, prices, procurement, etc. This is not an insignificant factor if we realize that married people generally spend the greatest part of their lives in economic preoccupations. 'Virginity' presupposes detachment and thus leaves a 'virgin' free for other things.

The 'virgin' is also free from the negative aspects of married life. If the positive aspects of married life are the source of enrichment to man, the negative aspects are generally a source of impoverishment. Every good thing of high rank, when rightly understood and used, unites the person with God. The nobler it is, the more effectively does it fulfil this function. Conjugal love is the highest and noblest good in this world, but Von Hildebrand sees many dangers in it. As a result of its community of life and love, the heart may easily become absorbed too deeply in the beloved. Married people are especially exposed to the risk that their thoughts, wishes and interests will be so exclusively occupied by the beloved and the myriad concerns of their common life in the world that they do not live fully for God, but at best are content to avoid breaking His commandments. Moreover, the married man has his duties as such. As a married man he lives, in a special sense, in the world; he is obliged to attend to many worldly matters, which the married state involves, and still more the foundation of a family. If he permits all his thoughts and interests to be absorbed by these matters he may remain a servant and a friend of God, but he cannot be His 'bride' in the subjective sense.²⁴

24. D. Von Hildebrand, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

3. 'Virginity' as an example and encouragement to 'non-virgins'

The early Fathers of the Church pointed with pride to the large number of Christian 'virgins', who, in the midst of the heathen licentiousness that surrounded them, kept the banner of chastity flying, with results which slowly but surely had a salutary effect.²⁵

'Virginity' is a source of inspiration for married people to overcome the many difficulties in the practice of conjugal chastity. It is a testimony of fidelity to married people. Christian marriage has urgent need of the example of 'virgins' for its development amid the enormous difficulties which confront it. Thus 'virginity' has the particular privilege and task of contributing concretely to the existential realization of Christian marriage.²⁶

4. The eschatological significance of 'virginity'

The charism of 'virginity' has an eschatological significance. The fact of virginity bears witness before the world to the values of eternity as compared with those of time. It is a testimony to the fact that the 'virgin' believes whole-heartedly in eternal life and is willing to sacrifice the great gift of marriage in order to help others to attain those eternal values.

For Bernard Häring 'virginity' is a testimony to the kingdom of heaven, to divine things, to a future life. If there is no God or future life, if there are no supernatural realities, the life of 'virgins' is an absurdity. Either a 'virgin' is a fool, or there are supernatural realities. 'Virginity' strengthens the believer and challenges the unbeliever. It is a pointer to eschatological times when there will be neither marriage nor family.²⁷

Elsewhere Häring expresses the same idea. The entire Christian existence bears witness to the resurrection and to the expectation of the second coming of Christ. No matter how distinct or uncertain the final judgement may be, we exist in the

25. A. Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

26. L. Weber, *On Marriage, Sex and Virginity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

27. B. Häring, *The Law of Christ*, III, p. 384.

last hour. 'Virginal' life in the Church is a ceaseless reminder of the second coming. As the most vivid manifestation of readiness in the Church 'virginity' is a warning to every Christian to be totally ready for the coming of the Lord, to prepare to receive the heavenly Bridegroom. This makes him alert to the present opportunities and aware of the needs of his neighbour. 'Virginity' is an anticipation of the heavenly marriage feast. It directs our attention to the celestial espousals and the wedding banquet. 'Virginity' makes known that the eschatological forces of the Kingdom of God have broken the barriers of time and are already present, pressing forward on the way to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.²⁸

Edward Schillebeeckx sees the eschatological significance of 'virginity' in the fact that some Christians have already entered the state of being sons of the resurrection. They have already renounced concern over this transient world for another concern over the coming of the eschatological kingdom. Marriage can never be the last word for the Christian.²⁹

This point needs emphasizing, namely that marriage is not everything in life. It is very noble but it is a temporal reality. In the words of Marc Oraison, marriage is the means within the bounds of time on earth of the preparation of humanity for access to the kingdom of Eternity and, by virtue of its sacramental quality, of the building of the kingdom of God. Thus marriage is not eternal. "For at the resurrection they will neither marry nor be given in marriage." (Mat. 22: 30) This means that sexuality which is the specific character of the marital union, will no longer be exercised, precisely because the reproductive function of sex will no longer have reason to exist. It does not mean that persons will not be marked in the most intimate recesses of their psychological being with the characteristic differences of sex. The joy of unity in sexual union will be transcended by the infinitely more direct and total joy of participation in the unity of God Himself. Joy, then, will no longer be derived from transient sexual union but from the fullness of reciprocity in the eternal

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 389-391.

29. E. Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Secular Reality and Saving Mystery*, I, London, 1965, p. 191.

love of the Oneness of God. In this relationship sexuality as such will no longer have any part to play.³⁰ Von Gagern considers it an illusion to believe that a human partner can guarantee one's full completion and fulfilment. In every human union a certain portion of unfulfilment remains. Man has to accept that our deepest longings can never be satisfied by any being but God. Human partnership is only an indication, a promise, of the essential: the unlimited, infinite satisfaction we find in the absolute love-union, *unio mystica*, with Him Who is PERFECT LOVE.³¹

The person who receives and accepts the charism of 'virginity' becomes a living, continuous prophet such as Jeremiah was. His or her life attains the dignity of a divine message addressed to all Christians, married or single, and to all men. And the message reads: The visible framework, earthly life, and the value-systems of this present world are progressively passing away before our eyes (1 Cor. 7: 29-31): "we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." (Heb. 13: 14) A new world, a new life, a new order, a new value-system, a new mode of existence, the new creation of the Spirit, the era of the resurrection, the fullness of the kingdom is drawing ever closer: in fact, it is already here in its initial, imperfect stage. In this coming Kingdom, every man and woman will live the same glorious existence as the Risen Christ already lives. It is a whole new way of life: eating, drinking, securing clothes and shelter, buying and selling, goods and possessions, marriage, procreation, sexual intercourse,—all this will have been surpassed. These values of this world where we live according to the flesh will have no sense or purpose or meaning in the new world where we shall live according to the Spirit. Our 'virginity' points to this reality. It is already an anticipation and a beginning of this new way of life.³² 'Virginity' is an anticipation of man's final form of existence in salvation. All the same because it is an anticipation, it is as yet not manifest but hidden under the sign of humility and sacrifice.

30. Maro Oraison, *Man and Wife*, New York, 1962, pp. 77-78.

31. F. Von Gagern, *Marriage Partnership*, Cork, 1966, p. 104.

32. Aloysius Kedl, In the Footsteps of Christ, *loc. cit.*, p. 31.

Hence the awesome responsibility of the Christian 'virgin' to understand more and more the great charism he or she is trying to live; to be more clear and effectively communicative in the prophetic and testifying role.

5. The ascetical value of 'virginity'

As Albert Ple points out the man who accepts a life of 'virginity' enters a condition in which his whole emotional life is going to be profoundly affected. "It is not good that man should be alone", said God after having created Adam. "I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen. 2: 18) The man living a life of 'virginity' renounces obedience to this law, which God has made part of his nature and which inclines him to seek self-realization in a whole network of human relationships among which the conjugal and the parental have by far the greatest significance.³³ Friedrich Wulf lists a threefold renouncement in 'virginity': that of the use of the sexual powers to which man by nature is oriented, that of the companionship of a person of the opposite sex, and that of children and a family.³⁴

First there is the urge to use the sexual powers; an urge to present oneself to a person of the opposite sex. A 'virgin' has to find a substitute in order to fulfil this urge. Of course there is no automatic substitute for this. A 'virgin' should be able to present himself or herself in a visible way as a being with a body. This happens in one's own room and in the place where one works. These are places where one's bodily presence is rooted; here is where one is at home. Possessions in themselves provide an opportunity for self-expression and for the attainment of a healthy relationship to one's body. No one can live without possessions (and these are not the same as personal property). There must be things destined directly for the body, such as clothing, or others connected with one's work or merely designed to please. Finally, work must be included as one of the irreplaceable means for the proper integration of body and sexuality. In work a

33. Albert Ple, "Celibacy and the Emotional Life", *The Clergy Review*, 55 (1970).

34. Friedrich Woulf, "Celibacy and Virginity", *Theology Digest*, 13 (1965), p. 107.

man best expresses himself. It goes without saying that such work must be meaningful so that one can really make something out of it. Under work should be included pastimes; occupations designed only for relaxation. Whatever a 'virgin' does to create joy contributes to the carrying out of his act of renunciation in a human and religious way.³⁵

Men, as a rule, find the renunciation of family life very difficult. By nature a man inclines to look after his own, to be recognized in his circle. The older he becomes the more he appreciates home and security. But the family is also most important for the woman, for she is its soul and in it she finds fulfilment. Renunciation of children affects women more than men. It usually is the most difficult renunciation a woman can make, for children are her most natural self-expression. Since the child is completely dependent on the mother and, conversely, since the mother is able to satisfy the needs of the child, the mother experiences in the child a sense of importance and fulfilment: the child is all her own. Renunciation of family and children can be integrated by a selfless giving of self in the service of others. Freedom from the cares of a family should make one free to shoulder the cares of all. Here is the heart of the call to 'virginity'. Nothing frees a man from the feeling of being alone and of being insecure as much as care for others. The man who is always concerned for others is forever fashioning for himself new places of security where he can be at home. There are marvellous persons who precisely because they are unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, have matured into selfless lovers. God has given them a new fruitfulness as fathers and mothers of a great family.³⁶

The lack of a partner of the opposite sex can be very painful. The unmarried man does not have the things that stimulate and bring a person to the kind of self-expression wherein he finds himself. He does not have someone who knows him intimately and gives him an awareness of his own ability, who provides him with a sense of security and support, and whose tolerance and attitudes supply a ready corrective for his own. The

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

unmarried woman does not have someone who looks out for her with loving attention, and who can awaken her inner life, shape and form her, and help her along her proper way. She does not have a partner who takes her completely as she is, and to whom she can look up for shelter and encouragement.³⁷ The 'virgin' must live out, in the sphere of affectivity, the development of the supernatural virtue of love. The fundamental love of such a person's life is the love of Christ as inseparable from the love of men. His prayer, in which his love for God is chiefly exercised, must be frequent, intense and affective. His neighbour must be for him a 'sacrament' of Christ, so that he can love the men and women whom he meets with a love that is active in a truly human heart. Through such love can his emotional life develop in the context of an affectivity which, while inspired by supernatural love, does not cease to be as fully human as possible.³⁸

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37. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

38. Albert Ple, *Celibacy and the Emotional Life*, *art. cit.*, pp. 36-38.

Brahmacarya and Christian Virginity

"I ask not kin, nor name, nor place
Nor learned men's society.
Men's lore for me no value has;
Kuttalam's lord, I come to thee.
Wilt thou one boon on me bestow,
A heart to melt in longing sweet,
As yearns o'er new-born calf the cow,
In yearning for thy sacred feet?

I had no virtue, penance, knowledge, self-control. A doll
to turn

At other's will I danced, whirled, fell. But me he filled
in every limb

With love's mad longing, and that I might climb there
whence is no return,

He showed his beauty, made me his. Ah, me, when shall
I go to him?

Fool's friend was I, none such may know
The way of freedom; yet to me
He shew'd the path of love, that so
Fruit of past deeds might ended be.
Cleansing my mind so foul, he made me
like a god.
Ah who could win that which the Father
has bestowed?

"Except you enthrall me"

"With love's mad longing", in the words of Mānikka
Vacagar, the soul loses its reason in the divine madness—surren-
ders itself totally to what Paul calls "the foolishness of God".
Many a young person who has decided to be a celibate for the

sake of the Kingdom has heard people call him "foolish". Fancy giving up the joys of marriage to remain a brahmacāri: And to those who have not been enthralled by God's beauteous face, it does seem folly. "He showed his beauty, made me His", is all that one can answer in explanation.

The Hindu concept of Brahmacharya in its most perfect form is no different from the Christian understanding of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, for both mean making of God the centre and Lover of one's life. To give up mother, father, brother, sister and all we hold dearest in this world, to attach ourselves to Jesus Christ, is the same as what the brahmacārīni Meerabai who was ravished by God's love, meant when she sang :

Mere to man Rām nām, dusrā na koi.
 "I want only Rām; no other do I desire."

The Christian celibate and the Hindu brahmacāri can alike say to God :

Twameva Māta Pita twameva
Twameva bandhu-sakhā twameva
Twameva vidyā draviṇam twameva
Twameva sarva mama deva deva.

"Thou art my mother, my father, my brother, my friend:
 Thou art my wisdom, my wealth, my all, O God of Gods."

The celibate or brahmacāri decides to be one precisely because he has experienced God. It is true that often one thinks in terms of celibacy as a means of reaching or finding God but this seems to me an imperfect and incomplete view. It is, because God has already spoken the Word of Love – *Verbum spirans amorem*, – that a brahmacāri is born whether he be a Ramana Maharṣi or a Teilhard de Chardin – "a freeman called in the Lord becomes Christ's slave" (I Cor 7: 22). The whole point of consecrated chastity for us Christians is that it is a primary expression of love vowed wholly to Christ freely and willingly and forever because one accepts the marriage proposal of God. "From now your Creator will be your husband." (Isaiah 54: 4) Chastity tells of Someone; it has meaning only in view of this person. Only thus is the brahmacāri truly

joyous and free, like Francis of Assissi wooing the Lady Poverty or talking to the birds or taming the wolf of Gubio. Joy is surely the *signum magnum* of a true brahmacāri. The joy of the celibate, because he is in love with God, radiates so brightly that all who meet him experience something of God. He is joyous though he is a "slave of Christ" because he is a slave of his own free will. And he is free. He is as free as the wind because he can love hugely, deeply, universally, for chastity is nothing if not the liberation of the powers of love. But all this happens within the celibate – joy and freedom in loving – because he has once encountered God and has been 'ravished' by Him. "Except You enthral me, I never shall be free; nor ever chaste, except You ravish me." (John Donne) In that encounter something happened; God spoke, God acted, God gave; He gave him this gift freely. It is a "grace" and in contemporary idiom, grace is a happening rather than an achievement, a gift rather than a reward.

"A votary of ahimsa cannot marry"

This happening and gift mean that the person is 'set aside' (consecrated) as were the prophets of old; not set aside in the sense of being closed in oneself or pursuing a selfish goal in life, but in being liberated for others. He is now primarily "a man for others". When Gandhiji said "a votary of *ahimsa* cannot marry", this is what he meant. *Ahimsa* means universal Love. The fulfilment of *Ahimsa* is impossible without utter selflessness. If a man gives his love to one woman or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It reminds one of Paul's injunctions to the Corinthians when he spoke of virginity as a higher calling than marriage and spiritually more profitable (1 Cor 7: 38): "I say this only to help you.... that you give your undivided attention to the Lord. An unmarried man can devote himself to the Lord's affairs – all he need worry about is pleasing the Lord." (1 Cor. 7: 35)

However, we know that while Gandhiji gave a tremendous impetus to the leading of a life of brahmacarya – in the full sense of the word (one who fares – *carati* – according to Brahman) and spoke of "the full and proper meaning of Bramacarya as the search for Brahman", he also thought of

the sex urge as something "meant only for the act of pro-creation". Any other use of it is against God and humanity. And while he raised marriage from the popular Hindu conception or practice - "the wife is not the husband's bondslave" (vide. Eph. 5: 31-33), he seems to have forgotten and positively excluded the human and psychological element in human and married love.

Gandhiji's views on marriage and celibacy however must not be taken as typically Hindu. The scheme of life in four stages (*Āśrāms*) continued to be held up as the ordained type in *Dharma* literature to a very late date. Even earnest and intelligent seekers lived the lives of married householders. In Upaniṣadic times, while Svetaketu the Brahmacārin was a life-long celibate, Naciketas his brother was different. After obtaining enlightenment from the god of death, instead of renouncing the world he continued to carry on the duties of a householder. Such a life, if well-lived, was considered adequate spiritual preparation for a happy future life. The Gita lays down the philosophical basis on which the householder's life is spiritually effective as *niṣkāmakarmayoga*. The Mahabharata confirms this ideal of *Gṛhasthaśrama* by making Rāma not only an avatar of Viṣṇu but in the company of his wife Sita, one of the most popular deities, (cf "*Indian Sadhus*" G. S. Ghurye). In Christian thought too, consecrated 'virginity' is not considered the only way of perfection, nor is this commitment required for the perfection of charity. All Christians are constituted in a relationship of spousal love to Christ through their destiny, accepted at baptism, of total union of life with Him in heaven. But all Christians do not express this relationship explicitly in the concrete structure of their lives as the religious life does.

Perhaps Gandhiji, the reforming ascetic, was reacting against the flood of sex literature and birth-control propaganda. With his unerring moral instinct and sincere soul he felt that man should not indulge his "animal passions" and escape the consequences of his acts. He went even further. "Sexual intercourse for the purpose of carnal satisfaction (between husband and wife) is reversion to animality." He seems to cast a slur on ordinary married relations. For Christianity, *In medio stat virtus*. We cannot force all to become brahmacharis as Gandhiji, one sometimes suspects, might have liked to do. The Christian

is invited – not forced – to give all. The range between obligation and counsel shows the psychological wisdom and clemency of the Christian position. For Gandhiji, however, brahmacharya had become an end in itself. His ascetic tendency unguided by clear and well-founded principles seems to have betrayed a high ideal into a false and untenable position. There is no need to look down on married love, because the human spirit can rise to a higher love. His esteem for celibacy was very high; he presented a picture of a sincere, self-denying soul – stark and tense – groping in the dark for the final goal, which was known but partially to him. He lacked the complete knowledge of the Truth which he worshipped – the Truth of “the Word made flesh” – and therefore the dignity of a human body called to be a temple of the Trinity (cf I Cor. 3: 16; 6:13–15; Rom 8: 9) and honoured in a glorious Resurrection (I Cor. 6: 14).¹

“The importance of being carnal”

It is difficult to resist the perennial temptation to deny that “flesh enters into the essential definition of man”. As Marcel has noted, a man *is* body and his situation. To live a life of ‘virginity’, one needs to know and love the importance of the body. Thus we must be careful not to be seduced by the dualism implicit in the English language which permits us to speak of “having a body” (as if the possessor and the possessed were different entities). The existential insight into the incarnate nature of human existence may be stated in these propositions: A man’s body is his bridge to, and model of, the world; therefore as a man is in his body so will he be in the world.² A Christian brahmachari must know that the factor governing full incarnation is the willingness to trust that which cannot be controlled. The moment I identify myself with my body and become fully incarnate I involve the essence of what is me with something over which I have no ultimate control. If I listen to the voice of the body it is clear that feeling and sensation have a logic

1. Cf. Chapter on Mahatma Gandhi in “*Religious Hinduism*” (Ed. Neuner) *Ashram Observances in Action*, M. K. Gandhi; *The Law of Continence; Brahmacharya* (Pocket Gandhi series)
2. *To a Dancing God*, Sam Keen (Collins, Fontana)

of their own that is not always responsible to the will. Likewise the body has its seasons of ebb and flow, impotence and potency, sickness and health, and finally life and death. Only as I am able to accept this rhythm am I able to become fully identified with my body. According as I trust or mistrust the rhythm of my body, I trust or mistrust my total world. Thus if we lose the body we lose the world. This is the danger of not loving one's body. Love of both nature and cosmos rests upon love of self; the sacred rests upon the carnal.³ Perhaps we have not sufficiently pondered the fact that this "rare gift of God", this call to consecrated 'virginity' has its source in the Eucharist (Opt. Totius 10) because it is the Body of Christ.

"I have no admiration for this sort of brahmacharya"

The view expressed by some Hindus, at times, tending to reduce brahmacharya to mere continence of the body, stems as much from a possible misapprehension of the role and sacredness of the body, as from the fact that a celibate can be happy and useful only if he has chosen his celibacy for the purpose of the Beloved. "My meaning of Brahmacharya is this: One who never has any lustful intention, who by constant attendance upon God, has become.... capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without being in any manner whatsoever sexually excited." (Mahatma Gandhi: "The Last Phase" Vol I p. 591) This seems greatly to reduce the beauty and splendour of brahmacharya. Many Gandhian social workers, for instance, chose to remain celibate, but if celibacy is nothing but being unmarried for the sake of apostolic service, then deep personal loneliness will be its universal characteristic, and celibacy becomes a burden and an anguish. Gandhiji⁴ received a letter which runs as follows: "I am miserable, I am haunted by carnal thoughts, even whilst I am in my office, on the road, by night and day whilst reading or working, even whilst I am praying. How is a wandering mind to be controlled? How is one to learn to look upon every woman as one's mother? How is the eye to radiate forth purest love? How can evil thoughts

3. Ibid

4. "What is Brahmacharya" – article by Gandhi in *Navjivan* of 25 May 1924, translated by Mahadev Desai.

be eradicated? I have before me your article on Brahmacarya but it has failed to help me." Gandhiji's comment was "This condition is heart-rending. Many suffer from it." And the result is that modern Hindus like K. M. Munshi advocate the *Madhurya*-sublimated sex-urge, or *Dampatya* - sublimation through marriage, or *Avibhakta Atma* - sublimated sex-relations. He rightly says: "Brahmacarya has been understood as the denial of sex. But the mere horror of women or the giving up of the sex act is not non-waste. If the sex urge is not transmitted into intense longing for absolute Love and Beauty, its mere repression may have dangerous results."⁵ K. M. Munshi gives examples of sadhus he knew who though celibate were not joyously creative: "A stolid agriculturist who would not be in the same room as a woman... but whose sex-urge had not been sublimated, and it is possible that with a good wife he might have been the happy father of numerous children, loving his home with passionate creative energy." Have we not sometimes met religious men and women of whom we have had the same thoughts when they have displayed their emotional immaturity? "I know of another eminent sadhu, who has given a pledge to his guru that he will not look at a woman. Whenever he moves, on the road or in the train, his anxiety is not to see women. As soon as he sees a coloured sari, he covers his eyes with a piece of cloth. Instead of the sex-urge being sublimated it has become a nightmare." K. M. Munshi adds "I have no admiration for this form of Brahmacarya." Who would? Something is missing here - of the Breath of the Spirit. The treasure of the sadhu's heart's desire has been withdrawn from the world but has not been laid at the lotus feet of God, or in His divine Heart, in contrast to Mechtilde of Magdeburg who wrote:-

Soul: Lord I bring you my treasure;
It is greater than the mountains,
Wider than the world,
Deeper than the sea,
Higher than the clouds,
More glorious than the sun,
More manifold than the stars,
It outweighs the whole earth!

5. *Bhagavad Gita & Modern Life*, K. M. Munshi & R. R. Diwakar (Bhavan's Book University)

Christ: What is your treasure called?

Soul: Lord it is called my heart's desire!
I have withdrawn it from the world
Denied it to myself and all creatures
Now I can bear it no longer
Where, O Lord, shall I lay it?

“Under the pressure of the Indwelling Spirit”

It has been suggested too that modern men and women can jointly sublimate their sex-urge when they fall in love, by a creative concentration on *yukta-vihāra*. The joys of a yogi would be theirs leading up to an Undivided Soul - *Avibhakta Atma*. Two bodies, two temperaments, differing emotions, varying degrees of idealism, have to be wedded into one under the pressure of the indwelling Undivided Soul, which lives, moves and has its being in two different human bodies. The day of the solitary brahmachāri is gone; women cannot be looked upon any longer as the “gateway of hell.”⁶ And yet all through the ages, and in all religions, the single brahmachari has been honoured and accepted in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sufism, as in Catholic Christianity. All have agreed on this point: brahmacharya at the highest level, means following the path of the Divine by total surrender to God - “*śaranāgati*”. This releases creative energy which draws its inspiration directly from God and makes the person become His instrument - *nimittamātra*” This is the witness given by those who have consecrated their ‘virginity’ to God; this is the great apostolic value of the vows. “Consecrated Virginity carries a paschal dynamism. I have response-ability to *possess myself* (self control) in order to *give myself* wholly; passage from my little line of miniscule life to the great line of paschal life.”⁷ Because chastity is a vow of love, it has necessarily to be a vow of renunciation. “In the language of the West”, continues Munshi, *śaranāgati*... is Agape - God’s way to man; it is unselfish love which “seeketh not its own” and freely spends itself, for it rests on God’s own riches and fullness.” Whether brahmacharya is accepted merely as the first of the

6. Ibid

7. “Spousal Commitment in Religious Life”, David Knight, *Review for Religious*, January 1973.

Aśramas or whether a brahmacārin adopts *naisthika brahmacarya* (life-long celibacy) it is always under the pressure of the Indwelling Spirit of Light, of Love, of Power, that he surrenders himself to God, the Beautiful One,. In such beautiful love, there is the joy of giving up – *tena tyaktenā bhunjithā* . All that we see in this great universe is penetrated by God. Renounce it and enjoy it. In this first verse of the *Iśa Upaniṣad* is summed up the essence of the meaning of brahmacarya. This can be traced back to the earliest times both of Christianity and Hinduism.

The Perennial magnetism of “Raso vai Sah”

Christ in His beauty said “Follow me” and the first disciples left their nets and their fathers and followed Him⁸. From the earliest days of the Church ‘virgins’ followed the Lamb, until gradually orders and congregations of men and women developed, so that today it is one of the most outstanding phenomena of the Catholic Church and not infrequently the object of envy of people of other faiths, who marvel at the utter selflessness, or dedication of the “missionaries” and think it has something to do with their brahmacarya.

In the history of Hinduism too, one finds the idea that the highest union is fully achieved only in the Brahmin who is a depository of Brahman, i. e.. in the Brahmacārin, “the man who follows the path of Brahman”. In an extravagant hymn (*Atharva Veda* II. 5) the Brahmacārin is extolled by virtue of the Brahman he carries within him, as Prajapati, the actual creator of heaven and earth. In the *Jābāla Upaniṣad* there is an unequivocal assertion that one may take to the life of a *sannyasi* without ever entering the life of a householder.⁹ “Later, when

8. Mk I. 17-18; Mtt. 4. 19-22. It is interesting to note that at the very moment of the call of disciples Christ promises them that they will become “fishers of men”. They are to leave all and follow Him not merely for their own joy, but to bring others to the *Param-Anand*.

9. It may be a relevant question to ask ourselves whether perhaps the Church should not consider the possibility of adopting *sanyās*, of allowing married householders at a certain stage to become “religious” just as she allows youth to become brahmacāris at an early age – perhaps at too early an age.

the ideal type of the disinterested householder supplanted that of the four stages of life, the life-long celibate ascetic type continued to be recognized as an ideal type alternative to it.”¹⁰

Characteristics of lifelong celibacy in Hinduism

Besides Svetaketu who is one of the earliest lifelong celibates mentioned in the Upaniṣads, there were the Ṛṣis known as *Sramanas* (those “endeavouring”), the *Tāpasas* (cf. Taittiriya Aranyaka II. 7; Bṛhadaranyaka IV. 3. 22) and the *Yatis* (controlled ones). P. V. Rane remarks that even in Ṛg Vedic times persons who led a life of poverty, contemplation and mortification were known and honoured as *muniṣ*, while persons corresponding to them among Non-Vedic people were probably called *yatis*.¹¹ Whatever they were called, it is clear that among the principal characteristics that distinguished an ascetic from earliest times in India were celibacy, austerity, concentration and ecstasy. In the Chandogya Upaniṣad (VIII-5) lifelong celibacy was identified with two kinds of practices of austerity: keeping “*maun*” or silence, and “*anāśakāyana*”, practice of non-eating or fasting. The Praśna Upaniṣad (I. 12, 3, 9) shows how when some sages approached the great Pippalāda with a desire to know Brahma, he asked them to stay with him for a year having faith, keeping celibate and practising austerity (*tapas*). The Mundaka Upaniṣad (I. 1, 8-9) states too that Brahma is nurtured by *tapas*. These traits were required to attain God. Self-realization was declared as experienced through knowledge (*vidya*) and brahmacharya, and those who pursued them were described as wise and calm (*śānta*) men. In the Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad Yajñavalkya proclaims that for Brahma-realization wise men took to the life of mendicants without becoming householders as the path to self-realization. *Naiṣṭhika brahmacharya* as it later came to be known was looked upon as the natural course for one seeking self-realization. It is clear that Brahma-realization was the object of brahmacharya (cf. Kaṭha Upaniṣad I 2, 15), not merely as practised in ordinary “studenthood” but in the sense of *naiṣṭhika* celibacy, along with other virtues. As we have seen, brahmacharya was not only an aspect of austerity, but owing to its

10. *Indian Sadhus*, G. S. Ghurye (Popular Prakashan)

11. *History of Dharmaśāstra*, P. V. Kane, Vol II, Part I, pp. 419-420.

detachment from life and because it gave an opportunity for the persistent pursuit of knowledge, it came to replace mere physical penance as a mode of spiritual endeavour. It is not without significance that in Puranic literature and popular Hinduism, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana, Sanatkumār, Sanatsujāta and Nārada are enshrined as the immortal brahmacāris able to give spiritual guidance to others. It is in the great traditions of these *naiṣṭhika brahmacāris* that Mahavir's life becomes intelligible. Śankarācārya was a *naiṣṭhika brahmacāri* and so were his favourite disciples. So were also the great jurist Vijñāneśvara designated Paramhansa, Nimbarka who founded the ascetic sect known as "Sanaka Sampradāya" and Madhavacārya, the great 13th century philosopher.

Brahmacarinis

Whether there were parallels of these great brahmacāris among the women of ancient India it is difficult to say. However Gārgi Vācaknavi, who in the Bṛhadaranyaka (III, 6. 1; 8, 1) once heckled Yajñavalkya, and the second time was satisfied with his answers on abstruse philosophical matters, was not only a Brah-mavādīni but a brahmacāriṇi celibate too. Significantly enough she is referred to through her patronymic Vācaknavī. It is also possible that some of those women who figure in the libations connected with Brahmajñā were brahmacārinis. Vadavā-Prātithēyī is one such. Another woman of ancient fame, known in Purāṇic literature by the patronymic of Sāṇḍilī, and significantly known otherwise as *Svayamprabhā* (self-resplendent) is described as an ascetic practising austerities on Mount R̥sbha on the eastern sea-board. In modern times the disciples of the Rama Krishna Mission, and of āśrams like the Kanya Kumaris of Godavari Mataji at Sakori, or the Brahma Kumaris in Pune, prove the vitality of celibacy for women of other faiths today.

The Training of Brahmacarya

Living a life of chastity requires certain helpful conditions, so that the renunciation of marriage far from impoverishing a person, should enrich him and lead him to full maturity. The vow of chastity by consecrating the whole being, should give a new dimension to the sexual, emotive and creative powers. Openness to all and complete acceptance of others demands a

whole-hearted gift of self. Absence of egoism strengthens human love, making it tender as well as chaste, and this love, united with the love of Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, becomes a source of life for many.¹² There are many means to it: first of all, clear and full teaching on the significance of the vow of chastity and then a biological, psychological and theological formation given gradually according to the need. Indeed through all his self-knowledge and his relations with others, a religious will come to realize the absolute need of asceticism in his life.¹³ Further, natural means for promoting health of mind and body should be considered important. Physical exercise, reasonable relaxation, and a life of serious work involving the whole person help to develop that physical and emotional equilibrium which is needed for chastity.

Finally, an affectionate and happy home-life helps each one to live his vow of chastity in all its fullness, as our Lady did. She translated her deep love for God into total commitment to Him and to her universal motherhood. In an atmosphere of fraternal love, true friendships centred on God can develop. With understanding and acceptance, a religious reaches maturity more easily and become more sensitive to grace.

It is interesting to compare this Christian understanding of the means required for celibacy with the Hindu view.¹⁴ "One can only proceed along the path of Brahmacharya by removing attachment, fear and wrath from the ordinary wasteful expenditure of creative energy, by perfection in action, by being controlled in word, body and mind."¹⁵ But when even a step is gained along the path of brahmacharya, creative vigour is strengthened, and surrender becomes a creative force in life.

Then the creative power of the Spirit is achieved.

The training for bramacharya, it will be clear, follows the same lines throughout:

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12. *Orientations ad experimentum* – Special Chapter 1967.. of the Society of the Sacred Heart.
 13. *Perfectae Caritatis* 12.
 14. *Bhagavad Gita & Modern Life*, K. M. Munshi.
 15. *Ibid.*

- (a) to stop waste of every kind in speech, bodily activity and mind;
- (b) to divert the will to pleasure by concentrating first on the pleasures of the imagination and then on the mysterious joy which beautifies things;
- (c) to love home, parents, caste, country, ideals, God, or anything whatever, other than oneself with an intense burning, perfervid enthusiasm, devoid of self-interest;
- (d) to concentrate on this love till one can surround oneself with an atmosphere of beauty;
- (e) to acquire by constant endeavour the love of Absolute Beauty, and to offer up all thoughts, words and deeds to such Beauty at all times.

Thus can we acquire that 'Surrender to God', that is, to Beauty, Freedom, Love, Light and Power, which are nothing but the different aspects of Joy which is God.

Conclusion

To end where we began: it becomes clear that to live a life of celibacy, a brahmachari has to be "called", and the only sure guarantee of his remaining a joyful celibate is that he should be thoroughly enthralled by God's beauteous face—whether it be revealed in Christ Jesus or in one of His more hidden manifestations pointing to Him. Whatever similarities or dissimilarities there may be in the Christian and Hindu concept of 'virginity', the religious in India today should be clear as to what is valuable in the Hindu concept, if an indigenous form of Christian celibate life is to evolve.

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Virginity and Marriage

The new insights into sexuality and the developments in the theology of marriage, in this century, are clearly a matter for appreciation. This rethinking on sexuality and marriage has affected virginity also. Now the meaning of virginity, better consecrated virginity, can be understood well. Thus at present the relation between consecrated virginity and marriage is never questioned: on the contrary virginity can be understood and appreciated better only by grasping the real meaning of marriage, and vice versa.

But if we go through the history of the sacramental theology of marriage, we come to know at once that this has not always been the case. There were many ups and downs for both marriage and virginity in the history of salvation. Often virginity was extolled, at times even at the expense of marriage. The following pages begin with a historical survey in order that a general idea of these changes may be obtained. Next the relationship of the two subjects will be explored, finally there will be a consideration of the superiority of virginity over marriage.

I. A historical survey

In primitive times sex and procreation were regarded as something mysterious and hence belonging to the sphere of the divine. Gods were believed to exist as married couples. Fertility cults were practised to placate them. Thus, through a wrong notion of sex, primitive people gave much importance to marriage and fertility.

The O. T. period

The revelation of the O. T. desacralized or secularized marriage. The main aim of revelation was to arrive at a purified conception of a personal God unrestricted by the cycle of fertility and whose power cannot be captured by sexual rites. It laid the foundation for a consideration of sex and marriage

as the gracious gifts of the omnipotent Creator.¹ Thus marriage began to occupy its proper place in the history of salvation.

The Genesis texts clearly express the equal status and complementary aspect of both sexes.² The fall has not radically deformed them, though it affected them. Fruitfulness in marriage was considered the greatest blessing of God,³ while sterility was a reproach or even a curse.⁴ In short, the O. T. teaches the goodness of sex and marriage.

Though the O. T. does not speak about it as state of life, virginity before marriage was highly regarded and even protected by law. If a girl before marriage lost her virginity, she deserved serious punishment.⁵ The O. T. seems to take it for granted that a typical servant of God is a married person. Hence the promise of Moses to the chosen people that if they are faithful to Yahweh none among them, man or woman, will be childless.⁶ However some passages of the O. T. seem to mean that sexual intercourse is somehow incompatible with nearness to God.⁷

The N. T. period

The N. T. completes the doctrine of marriage followed by the Jews. Stressing the idea of 'one flesh' taught by Genesis, Christ perfected the teaching on unity and indissolubility⁸. St Paul, too, speaking of matrimony points attention to this unity (I Cor 7: 1-2). At times he corrects some ideas of the early Christians. He writes to the Corinthians that those who marry do not commit sin (I Cor 7: 28, 36). Also he warns Timothy that those who forbid marriage are liars and are influenced by deceitful spirits (I Tim 4: 1-4). St Paul's teaching on marriage is complete only when one refers to his exposition of the significance of the union of husband and wife, found in the epistle to the Ephesians

1. E. Schillebeeckx, *Marriage*, vol. I., London 1965, p. 37.

2. Gen 1: 26-28; 2: 18-25.

3. Sam 1: 1-8.

4. Gen 39: 23; Lev 20: 20-21; Hos 9: 14 etc.

5. Deut 22: 20-21.

6. *Ibid.* 7: 14.

7. Ex 19: 15; 1 Sam 21: 4.

8. Mt 5: 31-32; Mk 10: 9-12; Lk 16: 18

5: 22-33). Here, comparing marriage to the union between Christ and the Church, Paul gives the theology of Christian marriage with an accent on mutual love.

With the N. T. begins the era of virginity. John the Baptist, the precursor of the Son of Man, was himself a 'virgin'. But it is with Mary, the Virgin Mother, and Christ, her divine Son, who is our model in this as in all other aspects of the Christian life, that 'virginity' is properly promulgated. St Paul repeats the teaching on 'virginity' in his first letter to the Corinthians and gives the advice that it is better to remain unmarried (I Cor 7).

The patristic period

The revolutionary teaching of Christ and his apostles was taken as a challenge by the early Church. One thing which made a great impact on them was the practice of 'virginity' by those who wanted to dedicate themselves exclusively to the service of God. During the time of St Paul there were Christians who thought that all should renounce marriage and observe complete continence. At the beginning of the second century there existed 'virgins' in the Christian community at Smyrna. This is clear from the writings of St Ignatius of Antioch.⁹ Some years later, St Justin speaks about "men and women, Christian from birth who kept their virginity for sixty or seventy years".¹⁰ From the Acts of Martyrs we know that there were Lucys and Agneses who shed their blood to preserve their virginity.

In the early Church innumerable volumes were written by the Christian writers about the meaning and value of 'virginity'. Almost all the Fathers of the Church have written at least one treatise on 'virginity'.¹¹ St Ambrose, for example, bases the understanding of 'virginity' on the increased realization of the role of Mary, the Virgin Mother¹². For St Augustine, 'virginity' in itself is nothing. It has meaning only when it is dedicated

9. St Ignatius, *Ep. ad Smyrn*, 13

10. PG 6, 349

11. Cf. Charles A. Schleck, *The Sacrament of Matrimony*, Milwaukee, 1964, pp. 250-54.

12. PL 16, 313 ff.

to God or when it is of the consecrated kind. The virgin then earns the title *sponsa Christi*.¹³

The appreciation and esteem for virginity had its side-effects also. At times virginity was extolled at the expense of marriage. The Christian authors of the second century had to insist that marriage is not a sin. A century later a council of the local bishops at Gangara, Turkey, condemned those who disparaged or denied the goodness of marriage.¹⁴ During this period, though the Church defended the goodness of marriage against heretics, there were Christian authors, including some of the Fathers of the Church, who were at least hesitant about the complete goodness of sex and marriage.¹⁵

The scholastic period

This period is distinguished by its radical changes in theology. It affected also the theology of marriage and virginity. The most important advance in the theology of marriage in the Middle Ages was the explicit declaration of its sacramentality. Thus though implicitly contained in the early tradition and practice, this doctrine could only be clearly formulated when the Church came to the explicit possession of her sacramental doctrine.¹⁶ Even for St Thomas it was only probable that marriage confers grace,¹⁷ though later he declared this to be a truth of faith.

During this period, 'virginity' also was much praised. Against the errors of the time, the Council of Trent gave its definition that consecrated virginity is a better and holier way of life than matrimony (D 979). For St Thomas the excellence of virginity does not involve any necessary degradation of marriage.

13. PL 40, 401.

14. Cf. Joseph E. Kerna, *The Theology of Marriage*, New York, 1964 p. 15.

15. Enda McDonagh (ed), *The Meaning of Christian Marriage*, Dublin, 1963, p. 168.

16. The official pronouncement on the sacramentality of marriage was made in 1274 in the second Council of Lyons. Then came the infallible definition in the Council of Trent.

17. *Supplementum*, p. 42, a. 3.

However, even St Thomas is not entirely clear about the goodness of sex in man's present fallen state.

The modern period

After the scholastic period the Church continued to defend and expound the teaching of Trent on marriage and virginity. Unfortunately there was an imbalance in the relationship between them. This is not to say that the merits of virginity were exaggerated, but that the theologians neglected to explain the theological richness of the sacrament of marriage¹⁸. They were content with treating marriage as a contract between two persons. Thus the treatise on marriage was relegated to the sphere of canon law¹⁹.

In the last hundred years there have been three major encyclicals on marriage and the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II. All three encyclicals condemning the contemporary evils gave new insights into the theology of marriage. Thus Pope Leo XIII not only defended the very institution of marriage in *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* but also devoted a section to the specifically sacramental aspect of marriage. Pope Pius XI's *Casti Connubii* though chiefly dealing with some current moral issues has some significant passages about the doctrine of the sacramentality of marriage. It also draws attention to the personal development of husband and wife, a subject which had hitherto received little attention.

The Council Fathers of Vatican II, expounding the sanctity of marriage and the family, emphasized the centrality of conjugal love and the concept of a covenant relationship between the couple (n. 49). In explaining the nature and purpose of marriage the Council avoided the term 'contract' and also the terminology of 'primary' and 'secondary' ends of marriage. Though it did not treat of the subject exhaustively the stress it lays on conjugal love and the strongly personalistic tone of the entire section, frees marriage from mere legalisms and philosophical abstractions.

18. Cf. Charles P. Kindregan, *A Theology of Marriage*, Milwaukee 1967, pp. 4 ff.

19. For a good explanation of this point, see Enda McDonagh *op. cit.*, pp. 36 ff.

Humanae Vitae of Paul VI mainly deals with the problem of artificial birth control. All the same in its introductory part, following the tone of Vatican II, it explains beautifully the nature of conjugal love (n. 8-9) and responsible parenthood (n. 10) which are vital points for a full understanding of the sacrament of marriage

Thus though marriage as an institution existed from the beginning of the world, it took more than a thousand years for the Church to formulate in clear and explicit terms its teaching on the sacramental nature of marriage. It took another thousand years to develop a proper theology of marriage, and this is still only in the making²⁰.

Till the middle of the twentieth century the excellence of virginity and celibacy was never questioned. But in 1954 Pope Pius XII, through his encyclical *Sacra Virginitas* had to condemn the following errors: 1) perpetual chastity would do harm to the balance of one's nervous system and therefore to one's personality; 2) marriage is a fitter instrument of sanctity than virginity, for marriage is a sacrament while virginity is not; 3) the mutual help sought by a couple in Christian marriage is a more effective aid to personal sanctity than the solitude of virgins and celibates (AAS pp. 175-177). Next, the different documents of Vatican II²¹ dealt with the meaning and excellence of consecrated virginity. In 1967 Pope Paul VI, through his encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, expounded the christological, ecclesiological and eschatological significance of virginity and celibacy and completed the already very rich teaching of the Church concerning them.

II The relationship between marriage and virginity

I. The purpose of marriage and virginity

Theology teaches us that each and everyone has a divine vocation "to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect". All, whether married or celibate, are expected to respond to this divine vocation. This is the very purpose of human life. To lead a married life or a life of consecrated virginity is not an end in

20. Cf. J. Dominian, *The Christian Marriage*, London 1967, p. vii ff.

21. PC no. 12; LG no. 42; OT no. 10; PO no. 16.

itself, but only a means to something else i. e., union with God. This is the ultimate purpose of both marriage and virginity.

But when we consider marriage and virginity as states of life lived in this world, there is a difference between them. This, however, pertains only to this life, for in the kingdom of heaven there will be neither marriage nor giving in marriage, but all will be like the angels in heaven²².

2 The meaning of marriage and virginity

Marriage can be described as a God-given, life-long community of love, created for the promotion of the life of the spouses and of their children. The essence of marriage is the conjugal covenant. On this rests the integrity of the physical, psychological and social relationships of the spouses, who participate in the sacramental life of grace.²³ In marriage, the spouses dedicate themselves to each other without reserve. Because of the sacramental nature of marriage they meet Christ in and through each other when they exchange their consent. The grace-signifying, grace-conferring consent of the parties is an action of Christ. Thus in the personal encounter of human consent, the couple has a veiled divine encounter with the glorious Christ. In other words in the husband-and-wife encounter, the love of the husband brings the wife to a deeper and more lively realization of the love of Christ. In his contact with his wife the husband encounters Christ, i. e., the love of the wife helps her husband to become more and more an image of Christ and His Church. This is the real meaning of the symbolism used by St Paul (Eph 5.). This is also the mystery and sublime meaning of Christian marriage.

Like marriage, virginity as a way of life also primarily consists in a choice, a positive acceptance. While the marriage-partner chooses another human person, the virgin chooses God himself. In virginity there is a personal, total and exclusive commitment to God such as there is between a married pair. This commitment is not merely an intellectual assent, but a personal acceptance of Christ, the divine person, through faith. Because of the personal and total commitment to Christ, the 'virgin' is no

22. Mt 22: 23-33; Mk 12: 18-27; Lk 20: 27-38.

23. J. Dominian, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

longer free for the human love which is conjugal. He freely and joyfully gives up the physical, emotional and spiritual perfection which can be attained through marriage. This may cause some difficulty in his daily life. The power of physical sexuality, the sense of emotional incompleteness and personal loneliness etc., can create problems. But if he has a real spirit of faith and hope he soon realizes that he has the Supreme Person to love and to be loved by in return. It is a mistake to see the virgin as a defective and incomplete human being. Although marriage is a source of joy and development for man and wife, there is no essential deficiency in the unmarried, for each individual man or woman, whether married or not, is an independent and complete person²⁴. Again, marriage is not the only way to maturity and fulfilment as a person. If the virgin is conscious of his own motive for leading a celibate life and has a real appreciation of the goodness and beauty of what he is sacrificing, that very understanding and the suffering which it involves will prove a great source of personal maturity.²⁵

3 The intimate relationship between marriage and virginity

From what has been said it should be clear that there is a relationship, an intimate one, between marriage and 'virginity'. The meaning of marriage cannot be fully grasped without an adequate knowledge of 'virginity' and 'virginity', cannot be understood well, without knowing the full significance of marriage. Besides, 'virginity' is called the spiritual marriage in which the soul is united or wedded to Christ²⁶. In other words, both married love and dedicated virginity, in different ways, participate in the fundamental sacrament of the dynamic presence and action of God's love on earth; they express and participate in the alliance of love between Christ and his Church²⁷.

They are not only intimately related but they complement each other. Christian faith demands of us to accept and

24. Enda McDonagh *op. cit.*, p. 172,

25. AAS 49 (1954) p. 175.

26. Ibid. p. 166.

27. Enda McDonagh, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

renounce this world which needs redemption because of man's sin. Christ came to redeem the world, and every Christian is asked to participate in the mission of Christ. It is not enough that a Christian merely participates in Christ's mission. He is asked to achieve his own sanctification in and through this redeeming process. Thus every Christian is asked to accept this world as good and sanctify it.

But while making use of this world he has to realize its transitory nature. Man can achieve health and wealth and be happy in this world, but he cannot be permanently happy. This world is a place of preparation for another world. He can enjoy full happiness only in the world to come. So he who sacrifices the good things of this world for God is preparing himself for permanent happiness. That is the reason why Christian faith demands that we should renounce this world for higher objects.

In the sphere of sexuality marriage and virginity symbolize the acceptance and renunciation of this world. By the sacramental grace of marriage the husband and wife are expected not only to continue the mission of Christ in this world, but also to sanctify themselves. The family is even called the 'domestic Church'.²⁸ In spite of all its dignity, marriage belongs to this transitory world.²⁹ Through the sacrament of marriage the wedded couple accept this world. On the other hand, the 'virgin' renounces the relative good of human love and fulfilment in marriage and chooses to unite himself exclusively to God. Thus he renounces the world and reveals the transcendent aspect of Christianity in his own life.

Again, 'virginity' and marriage are necessary for the spread of God's kingdom. Through their fruitful conjugal love, the married pair build up the body of Christ, the Church. As living proofs of self-discipline in sexual matters 'virgins' provide support for the struggling and the weak. Without them, in their dedication exclusively to God, marriage and its values would appear to be absolute and permanent. Similarly divorced from the grace-affecting nature of marriage, 'virginity' might become a dangerous

28. LG. no. 11.

29. I Cor. 7: 31; I Jn 2: 15-17.

absolutism. Thus 'virginity' and marriage complement each other in bearing witness to the relative and transcendent aspects of Christ's mission.

III. The superiority of consecrated virginity

The historical survey has demonstrated that the superiority of 'virginity' over marriage has been constantly taught by the Church. The main arguments for this superiority are expounded here. It is useless to search for an argument in the O. T. as it does not even speak about 'virginity' as a state of life. However the N. T. recognizes it and recommends it as something superior to marriage.

Usually two passages from the N. T. (Mt. 19:10ff; I Cor 7) are adduced to prove the superiority of 'virginity'. Though the Church documents have always given the interpretation of Mt 19: 10-12 as a call to 'virginity'³⁰, there are authors who do not admit it. According to them this text refers to those who, after having separated from their marriage partners on account of *porneia*, remain single till their death because of their devotion to the ideal of conjugal fidelity. Their resolve to lead a life of complete dedication to a single person means they have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.³¹

St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians affirms the excellence of 'virginity' (7:8) and gives the motives for practising this way of life. Consecrated virginity helps one to give oneself undividedly to the things of the Lord (7: 32-34). "Here it must be noted that the Apostle is not reproving men because they are concerned about their wives, nor does he reprehend wives because they seek to please their husbands. Rather he is asserting clearly that their hearts are divided between love of God and love of their spouse, and beset by gnawing cares and so by reason of the duties of their married state they can hardly

0. D 980; AAS 21 (1954) p. 164; OT no. 10; LG no. 42 etc.

1. Cf. Quitin Quesnell, "Made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 30 (July 1968) pp. 335 ff.

be free to contemplate the divine."³² He is also careful to insist that this choice should be a free one (I Cor 7: 35).

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church, upholding the superiority of 'virginity', compare it to heavenly marriage. While earthly marriage is dissolved with death, 'virginity' is a marriage that is eternally indissoluble, since the bridegroom is Christ, the Son of God. What is more the true marriage for them is the marriage of 'virgins'. Earthly marriage is only a counterpart of it in this passing world.³³

Many of them taught clearly that 'virginity' and marriage do not oppose but complement each other. In fact, 'virginity' is superior because what is renounced (i.e. marriage) is good and holy. 'Virginity' proceeds along the same path as marriage, but goes further and transcends the earthly state. It attains directly the substance of eternal marriage, the eschatological union of the soul with the Word.

Sacra Virginitas of Pius XII gives also the following reasons: while the state of consecrated 'virginity' is not a sacrament and does not confer grace *ex opere operato*, still it does afford those who embrace it something spiritual which far exceeds the mutual helps which married persons confer upon each other. The personality of those who embrace this state of life does not suffer harm. On the contrary, God shares with these persons His own divine life in a more abundant manner³⁴. Besides, by leading a life of total dedication to God, they do not abdicate their fatherhood or motherhood; they beget children for the heavenly and eternal life.³⁵

A psychological argument for the superiority of 'virginity' over marriage may be added. In every state of life we have to respond to the call of God. In marriage Christian couples, exercising mutual love and becoming one flesh, strive together to answer the divine call. The consecrated 'virgin' on the contrary

32 AAS 21 (1954) p. 168

33. PL 40, 400 ff; PL 16, 195; PG 46, 334; PG 37, 632-634.

34. AAS 21 (1954) p. 176

35. Ibid.

following the example of Christ, tries to arrive at divine love, single-handed, without a human help-mate. In other words, what married persons do through intermediaries, the 'virgin' does directly. In this way the 'virgin' makes a heroic attempt to respond to the divine call. Anticipating on earth the angelic life of eschatological times the 'virgin' gives testimony to the law of generosity that characterizes the New Covenant. This fact proves in a most tangible and visible manner the excellence of consecrated 'virginity'.

Conclusion

Marriage and 'virginity' are not only intimately connected but complement each other. One can be understood adequately only in the light of the full meaning of the other. Objectively speaking, consecrated 'virginity', as a state of life, is superior to marriage. All these ideas are well expressed by the Second Vatican Council in its advice to the seminarians who have to lead a life of consecrated 'virginity': "Seminarians should be duly aware of the duties and dignity of Christian marriage, which bodies forth the love between Christ and the Church. Let them perceive as well the superiority of virginity consecrated to Christ, so that by a choice which is maturely thought out and magnanimous they may attach themselves to God by a total gift of body and soul." (OT n. 10)

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Joseph Thekkinedath

Celibacy without Play ?

Psychiatrist Dr William Stevenson once claimed that as much as 90% of all his cases involving marital break-down and personality disturbances stemming from problems of sexuality, were due to the fact that the persons involved had *never learned to play*.¹ Conditions of acute anxiety and fear arose from an over serious attitude towards sex. Frustration and feelings of guilt about frigidity, the violence of the sex urge, homosexuality and lesbianism haunted those for whom early experience (or lack of it) of their sexual potential was not achieved in joy, light-heartedness and a sense of liberation.

Comparative psychologists, like Harry Harlow², have established the fact that deprivation of peer group contact and play experience in early years has important negative effects on adult sexual adjustment. Granted that extrapolation from animal to human behaviour is fraught with dangers, their insights have some value for man and support similar findings in children, by developmental psychologists and psycho-analysts. An activity in childhood popularly called 'play', seems vital for the growth of an integrated adult personality.

However, psychologists have now moved away from a concept of play as a behaviour proper to childhood only to a deeper understanding of *play as a quality of life*, of all adult life too. Because of the close link between *play*, as a way of experiencing life and *sexual integration*, the question should be asked. Is it possible that the charismatic gift of celibate love is offered only to those who know how to play? or at least, only to those who are willing to learn to play? This is a far more radical question than the one currently being asked with increasing insistency, regarding the place of leisure in the life of a religious. Yet, both questions are important and answers to

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- 1) Seminars in Clinical Psychology at London University, 1968.
 - 2) Harlow's work with primates at the Yerkes Primate Laboratory.

them will have far-reaching effects on programmes of formation in seminaries and convents, and on the future of religious life. More will be said later about what play is; for the moment let us reflect on who a charismatic celibate is.

Charismatic celibacy

The core of Christian celibacy is an insight, a religious experience of 'the Kingdom of God (Mt 19: 12). This experience affects the emerging personality profoundly and marks it for celibacy. As Schillebeeckx defines it: "Celibacy is an existential inability to do otherwise".³ The celibate is 'unmarriageable', because he has been marked by his experience. Personality is neither a 'thing' nor a static identity, but a continuous process, 'a becoming'. From the individual's original experience (vocation) and his response to it, he is in a process of 'becoming celibate'. Becoming a person and becoming celibate are inseparable: the whole personality is celibate.

An external code of behaviour or pattern of ascetic practices, imposed or voluntarily undertaken will not of itself produce a charismatic celibate. True christian celibacy is a gift of love given to the people of God, and the basic motivation for accepting the gift is solely the Lord. As Egenter points out⁴, it is not a disparagement or a rejection of marriage and the sexual domain, or an 'angelic life' – in the sense of a life lived in the Spirit with the body and everything corporeal suppressed as much as possible, or the ascetic goal of complete mastery over the sexual urges, but the sole acceptance of the Lord.

At one time psycho-analysts would have been quick to claim that the sexual abstinence of the voluntary celibate leads *ipso facto* to repressions and subsequent neurosis. But now there is ample evidence in support of the psychological feasibility of celibacy. In fact some schools of analysts⁵ no longer find voluntary celibacy a problem.

3) E. Schillebeeckx, *Clerical Celibacy under Fire*, London 1968.

4) Richard Egenter, *Celibacy & Virginity*.

5) Dr J. Rosenbaum, "A Psychoanalyst's Case for Celibacy", *Catholic World*, May 1967.

Who is a Christian celibate? From the psychological viewpoint we must say that he is one who is FREE from frustrations, suppressions and feelings of guilt about his sexual nature and powers, not however through the intensely concentrated and negative effort outlined in the Upaniṣads, but through a joyous liberation from within. The freedom of the Christian celibate leads him both to mastery and to joy in his sexual powers. The whole of his life should have the quality of lightheartedness and discernment of the important, which is a quality of playfulness.

What is play?

Although man has long been interested in his ability to play and at least one noteworthy philosopher has described man as a playing animal⁶, psychologists have found it difficult to arrive at an adequate definition of play as behaviour. For some, the word has little scientific value, being merely the layman's label for the non-constructive and unrealistic behaviour of the child. But a gradual change in attitude has resulted from more precise research.

First of all one must distinguish between *games* and *play*. Games are organised rule-following activities which always include a competitive element. One basic goal of any game is to divide the 'winners' from the 'losers'; this competitive element is absent from play. It is generally accepted that both adults and children enjoy games, yet too often *play* is considered only as the label for activities appropriate to children. Actually games can be play for both adults and children, if they are approached with the right attitude of mind and the competitive element is unimportant.

Most theories of play have offered explanations of its functions only and have been unable to define its nature. At the end of the 19th century the most popular explanation was in terms of evolutionary recapitulation. In the 1880's Hall was claiming that in its play behaviour, the child recapitulates the evolutionary process of the race. For this there is no evidence at all. There is also Spencer's Theory of surplus energy which

6) Huzinger, *A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 1955.

is popular but unsubstantiated. Sudden bursts of great activity are usually not sustained and evidence for excess energy in children is almost totally absent. Gross claimed that play is simply the pre-practice of difficult skills required in adult life – but again this is an insufficient explanation. Lowenfeld suggests that man plays and in imagination gains mastery of reality in order to gain understanding and mastery of an environment otherwise difficult to control.

Certainly imagination has a part in play, but again a distinction must be made between *imagination* and *fantasy* as most writers use these words interchangeably. For Iris Murdoch, fantasy is “a way of unreality, cowardice and deceit.” For Harvey Cox it is “advanced imagining” – a higher, more developed skill. More concretely, imagination uses building blocks of the reasonable to construct its dreams. What is imagined might be highly improbable but it is not against reason. Fantasy on the other hand is not limited by reason, and is therefore potentially more problematic for the celibate.

A skilled and controlled imagination is essential to the celibate if his response to his charismatic gift is to be sustained. He must be creative and playful and this requires that the precious capacity for imagining be developed. Playfulness is at the source of human creativity because it puts aside the serious and the safely familiar and permits the imagination to run free and to experiment. How often has control of the imagination in programmes of religious formation become an attempt at extinction of imagination by disuse! Yet as Martin Buber urges “If we want to do today’s work and to prepare tomorrow’s with clear sight, then we must develop in ourselves and the next generation a gift that lies in man’s inwardness. I prefer *imagining the real*.” Imagination is the great servant of communication.

Is leisure considered a luxury to be kept in short supply in religious life, because too few have a sufficiently skilled imagination and strong sense of personal identity to cope with it profitably? Leisure is only possible when a man is at one with himself and also at one with the world. It is basically an attitude

of mind and heart, or "a condition of the soul" which colours perception of the whole of life. It is not work itself which is opposed to leisure but attitudes to both. Whether or not one agrees that "activism explains why teachers and doctors and Religious are frequently far from leisured people", it is often too obvious that though they supposedly enjoy a kind of leisure because they are doing what they want to be doing through motives of love and concern, in reality they allow the strained tense attitude of the "worker" to dominate their lives.

Play of the mind and heart

Contemplative prayer has been called play of the mind and heart; and it is when "a person has shed his utilitarian seriousness and given himself up to play of the mind and spirit that he can rest in the joy of the Lord's work rather than his own." Above all else the charismatic celibate is called to *enjoy* his *friendship* with God. Perhaps we have underestimated man's capacity and need for friendship: still more the obligation of friendship. Yet the injunction was clear enough: "Love one another as I have loved you,"⁸ "I have called you friends."⁹ If the celibate is to be a true friend of God and man, he must play.

Play and friendship are inseparable. "True friends are strongly impelled to play together; to celebrate their friendship and enrich its joys. Similarly the experience of joint play deepens and enriches the friendship."¹⁰

Andrew Greeley has described the essentially playful character of friendship very well in his chapter "A world to play in" from which this quotation comes: "Play is one of man's primary obligations and the people we are most at ease within our play are of course our friends. In playfulness we let much of our own imp out of the bottle in which we have encased him. Play brings us out of ourselves, enables us to relax, to have fun. In playful activities we put aside barriers, lower our defences, cast away inhibitions, and we are able to do this and enjoy it most completely when we know we can trust those with whom we

8) *Jn* 15, 12.

9) *Jn* 15, 15.

10) Andrew Greeley. *A Future to Hope in*. Image Books, 1970.

are playing. When we play together with someone we say, Look, we are both making fools of ourselves. We are both taking seriously things that are unimportant and refusing to take seriously things that are important. To be a fool together with someone else both requires friendship and deepens it, because the secret of shared play brings two people together in an intimacy which is all the more powerful because its strength is not realised until it has been established".¹¹

How deep should be the friendship and playful intimacy between God and the one who is growing in charismatic celibacy! The saints, the intimate friends of God – all knew this play. To mention only one, Teresa of Avila, who was that profoundly serious thing, a Doctor of the Church, prayed: "From silly devotions and sour-faced saints, deliver us, O Lord." She knew how to let drop, in a moment, the burden of administration and endless 'business trips' to grab her castanettes and dance on the table!

Play is indispensable to friendship and since friendship is rooted in sex, the relationship between play and sex is close. We are meant to play with our bodies, but the "inhibitions, the shame, the fears, the terrors which prevent sex from being playful are immense."

One who is unable to overcome these fears and learn to play seems unlikely to continue becoming celibate. A sense of personal sexual identity and conviction are necessary for religious to withstand the fears and opinions of others. This is especially true when modesty which is unquestionably a virtue, (though its content varies with time and place) has been confused with prudery and even worse with a paralysing somber and guilt-ridden shame. And the current climate of permissiveness and technological achievement can be equally psychologically paralysing.

It is interesting to trace the rise of the 'Protestant Ethic' in Europe and America which turned work and play into opposite and opposing occupations. Because of the post-Reformation emphasis on his powerlessness and the uncertainty of his salvation man began to live in unbearable anxiety. The 'remedy' was activism, which assumed a compulsive quality. Time became too

11) *Ibid.*

valuable to be spent on anything which did not serve a utilitarian purpose. This climate of opinion affected Religious life too, and frequently one finds that it still pervades religious congregations in India. Activism which assumes that the more a person is acting the more he is alive, is really a subtle way of running away from oneself. People 'keep busy' all the time to cover anxiety and as a substitute for self-awareness. True adult play, on the other hand, demands a high level of self-awareness, and self-awareness is something which, by and large, contemporary society is trying to avoid.

The Greek 'paradisos' from which we derive the word 'paradise' means a park. And a park is essentially somewhere to relax and to play. A traditional feature of the sources of relaxation of Indian society was the pleasure of gardens,¹² and an essential feature of the gardens even now is a swing, an object of pure play.

Scripture reminds us that man was created for the delight of the Lord, to 'play' in His paradise. He has the ability to steep himself in the whole of creation and joyously affirm that it is good.

The signs of the times tell us, however, that this ability is decreasing through lack of use. Man is deserting his paradise - his park to play in - for a technopolis of compulsive competitiveness. That is why the charismatic celibate now, must be able to play, must have *viveka* - 'discernment' of the momentary and the momentous - and enjoy the fun of turning values upside-down. He must rescue the world from its over-serious self-concern which spirals down into neurosis. Without a quality of playfulness and quiet mastery the life of the would-be celibate will be sucked irretrievably into the neurotic rat-race. To preserve true celibacy, to use and enjoy this gift of God, we must know how to "redeem the time and *make sport of it*".

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12) Basham, *The Wonder that was India*.

Consecrated Celibacy and Friendship

Consecrated celibates are to love God with an undivided heart and to centre all their love on God. Does this mean that they cannot love their neighbour with an affective love? Does warm human friendship, especially heterosexual friendship, infringe on their religious ideals, betray in some way their commitment to the Lord and detract somewhat from the purity of their love for Him?

The older spirituality seems to be afraid of affective love in the life of celibates. It appears to insist that priests and religious are people set apart for the love of God and it would be going back on their own commitment to indulge in human affective relationships. The purpose of this article is to take a critical look at this position. Attention will be mainly devoted to answering some of the difficulties that have been brought forward by conventional spirituality against friendship in consecrated celibate life. When we speak of friendship among celibates we have chiefly heterosexual friendship in mind.

A. Friendship, as a serious danger to celibacy

When we speak of celibacy and friendship, especially heterosexual friendship, a difficulty would crop up in certain quarters: Does not such friendship constitute a serious danger to celibacy, and therefore do not celibates have the obligation to avoid that danger at all cost?

There can be no doubt that especially heterosexual friendship poses some danger to celibacy. We are a part of a fallen race and are subject to the consequences of Original Sin. Hence our relationships with others and, in particular, our affective relationships with them are exposed to dangers that can threaten our consecration to the Lord. It would be rash to deny this fact. It would be imprudent not to take into account the real diffi-

culties that friendship can pose to our spiritual life. It is possible that we grow in attachment to a friend to such an extent that we forget about God. It is also possible that a certain friendship can land us in serious sexual difficulties.

a. The dangers not to be exaggerated

Friendship can create dangers to celibacy, but they should not be exaggerated. The manner in which we sometimes speak of them in respect of heterosexual friendships is apt to give a distorted view of such friendships from the very beginning. We may be inspired by the noble purpose of combating the usual perils but our harping on these can easily lead unthinking people to look at even a normal and healthy association of celibate men and women with suspicion.

We should not exaggerate the dark side of heterosexual relationships between celibates. We should recognize the natural goodness of love between man and woman and realize that it is susceptible to grace and is capable of salvation and transfiguration. We know that God's love and goodness created man and woman as they are, with all the attraction of two complementary natures. It is God who gave both sexes the power which causes them to seek and love each other. This mutual attraction and love is a source of untold blessings to humanity. These blessings, of course, are hidden and therefore receive no particular emphasis in our speech and in our writing. We usually have a penchant for the darker side of things. We more easily contemplate catastrophic events rather than constructive developments. Earthquakes destroy many lives in a matter of seconds and wars cause wanton destruction. We are touched by these calamitous events. For years they are spoken about and receive a prominent place in the pages of history. We never realize that the same forces of nature cause a thousand varieties of life every year to blossom. We are not impressed by them and they are not recorded nor talked about because they are "too ordinary" for us. Yet these minor miracles spring from the same universal laws from which lightning, storms and earthquakes proceed. We often have eyes only for what is desolating and disastrous. If we only reflected enough we would know that the forces of nature sometimes work to our

detriment but a thousand times more often for our good. Water may sometimes cause floods and drown people but most often it nourishes crops and provides power for our industries. Fire is sometimes destructive but it is generally of great value. It would be absurd to call these forces evil and affirm that they ought therefore to be avoided just because they are occasionally harmful.

Precisely the same thing can be said of heterosexual love, even among celibates. It is a divine force which provides enormous vitality to the human race. Love between man and woman is one of the most powerful factors in their spiritual and moral development. The purer the love, the more one is elevated, made indifferent to trifles and inspired with enthusiasm for all that is noble and sublime. Masculine strength united to feminine grace, masculine will combined with feminine gentleness, masculine enterprise joined to feminine yielding can be the well-spring of unsuspected human achievements. Of course we are not forgetting that heterosexual love can also be the cause of the most abominable iniquities. But because of this we should not condemn this love as dangerous and avoid it altogether.

Woman is not primarily a danger to man and the same is to be said of man with reference to woman. Fr Andrew Greeley observes that the sparkle in a woman's eyes, the flash of her smile, her soft laughter, the curve of her body, the warmth of her person, were designed by Providence to be disconcerting and fascinating to men. They are not meant to seduce men and lead them to perdition. Woman is not created to be feared and shunned by man. Greeley complains that it is not unusual to find male celibates who react with fear and suppression of their emotions when faced with intelligent and attractive women and this is supposedly done under the plea of safety. He does not commend this attitude. Heterosexual attraction is primarily a medium of communication, understanding and sympathy. The most characteristic feature of this attraction is its capacity to create a deep existential bond with the other. This has been confirmed by modern psychology which tells us that heterosexual attraction is a very powerful means of constructing, maintaining and reinforcing human bonds of affection and love. The priest, for instance,

who is sensitive to the nuances of heterosexual communication can expect to be a better priest, and a better human being.¹

Sister Genevieve Thille is convinced that heterosexual friendship between celibates can remain on the level of spiritual openness and community growth without descending into the genital-sexual area. A friendship in which the man and the woman are mutually the exclusive object of each other's attention may have a tendency to pass into the genital-sexual sphere. Such a tendency, however, is absent from a friendship in which the partners stand beside each other gazing at objective values.²

Fr Thomas Dubay calls attention to the fact that the NT does not evince any concern about the dangers of a holy affection. The reason might be that a genuine man of God and a holy woman know quite well why they are affectionate to each other and how their love is to be fittingly manifested. Warm affection is dangerous for foolish and worldly virgins, but not for wise and prayerful ones. On the contrary in the latter this kind of love enhances dedicated charity.³ If a celibate is one who engages in genuine prayer, there is little fear that warm love for others will pose any serious danger to chastity.

b. The permissibility of reasonable risks

Evidently there are risks in heterosexual friendship. Nobody can deny the danger to chastity present in warm human love. But the proper way of meeting this danger is not by removing its possibility through a radical uprooting of the good of human love. Such a strategy would be similar to keeping the stable clean by not feeding the horse.

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1. Andrew Greely, *New Horizons for the Priesthood*, New York, 1970, p. 68;
Martin Semple, "Chastity and Celibacy: Chastity in contemporary Moral Theology", *Sisters Today*, 43(1972) p. 596
 2. Genevieve Thille, "Love in Marriage and Celibacy," *Sisters Today* 41 (1969) p. 225
 3. Thomas Dubay, "Biblical concept of 'Virginal Love'", *Review for Religious* 28 (1269) p. 206

Love is always a risk; life itself is a risk. Some hazards to ourselves and to others are unavoidable in human life and are a part of every human relationship. We have to tolerate a certain amount of possible and remote danger if we wish to develop ourselves as human beings. If we are too preoccupied with the risk we run of injuring ourselves or others we would not be able to do anything worthwhile in this world. We would have to suppress all our emotions and desires. It is good to avoid the possibility of mistakes but not at the expense of rejecting all human experiences. Parents who were athletes do not try to frighten their sons and daughters out of sports just because there are dangers inherent in athletics. They know that the rewards of the physical activity involved in sports fully justify the dangers. The same is true of emotional activity. Love in its various manifestations is, after all, the justification for our living at all and therefore we are allowed to take proportionate risks in trying to achieve it.

The purpose of Christ's coming into the world was not to save us from risks but to liberate us from our self-centredness and to help us to open ourselves to God. He Himself did not avoid risks. He willed that he should come as a discredited and crucified Messiah rather than as a mighty hero, though He knew that salvation of those who expected a triumphant Messiah would be jeopardized. He permitted the apostles to live and work amidst hazards, and did not protect them from the risks of worldliness by asking them to flee from the world. On the contrary, He asked them to remain and work in it while keeping themselves untainted by its evil. We are true followers of Christ only if we are prepared to take reasonable risks in our spiritual life.

Fr Richard Egenter reminds us that it can never be a principle of Christian asceticism simply to avoid dangers. We have to see whether the values at stake are worth the risks. We have also to see to what extent they permit or demand that we take risks in the effort to achieve them. Of course, we are bound to avoid dangers proximate to serious lapses, that is to say, where they would lead with certainty or with a very high degree of probability to the moral and spiritual calamity of serious

sin.⁴ According to Fr Paul Molinari, the possibility of risk should not stand in the way of a consecrated celibate's cultivating and expressing affective love and friendship prudently. Otherwise he would be denying himself something of inestimable value, which if handled with discretion would greatly enrich his life.⁵

Fr Andrew Greeley goes so far as to say that those who cannot take some risks successfully in the area of heterosexual friendship may not have the emotional maturity to continue in their celibate vocation. While cultivating friendship it is possible that some will "fall in love", some will become "involved" and some will leave the priesthood or the religious life. If one is unhappy in the priestly or religious life, if one's will power is already weak, the delicious nature of human affection and friendship may be sufficient to compromise a priestly or religious commitment already facing serious difficulties. Greeley thinks that people in this condition are unfit to be priests or religious, whose vocation requires that they should be friends with the people of God. If there is a risk in giving one's self to others, in pulling down defence mechanisms and surrendering oneself to those whom one loves, it is a risk that priests and religious cannot and should not evade. If one loses oneself in the process of giving, it can only be said that the emotional maturity for choosing the priestly or religious life was lacking.⁶ It is good that such persons go into another vocation although it is unlikely that they will find happiness in it because of the lack of minimum capacity for trust and stability.

Fr Aidan Carr asks whether it is possible today for a celibate to avoid the risk of involving himself with people even if he wishes to. The time seems to be irrevocably over when a consecrated celibate could render service to the people of God from the security of an air-conditioned ivory tower. For better or for worse, priests and religious are thrown into a world of

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4. Richard Egenter, *Virginity: Some Ethical and Ascetical Aspects*, in: A. Auer and Others, *Celibacy and Virginity*, Dublin, 1968, p. 94.
 5. Paul Molinari, *Love: Its Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions*, in: *Consecrated Celibacy*, Ottawa, 1971. p. 38
 6. Andrew Greeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

people and have to become involved with them to some extent. Proper involvement means learning to live with problems and tensions of relationships to whose sweetness, warmth and charm one does not capitulate. If we really wish to work and suffer for God's people, there is no getting away from risks, for risk is precisely what life is all about.⁷

B. Friendship as derogatory to the virtue of renunciation

Fr Christopher Kiesling has convincingly discussed the ascetical aspects of human friendship.⁸ There is, first of all, the distress of separation, namely the suffering of parting and the pain of being apart. The celibate can easily unite this suffering with that of Christ and make it redemptive and salvific. Then there are the powerful emotions connected with friendship, which are difficult to handle, and these offer golden opportunities for self-control. We are not particularly thinking of emotions of a genital-sexual nature. They are, after all, not the most difficult to cope with. More difficult to tackle are the disappointment, the frustration and even hostility which normally accompany any relationship between two limited human beings, subject to whims, and capable of acting in a variety of ways. Two friends may expect from each other certain things which they may not be able or may not like or choose to give. The result is reactions not of love but of hatred. An inadequate handling of these reactions can easily end in enmity. Because of the depth of the relationship anything that affects it adversely will arouse strong negative reactions which are capable of destroying it.

The demands of mutuality in friendship too offers occasion for asceticism. Friends wish to receive the same amount of love that they give and in the manner in which it is given. But we know that two people are never alike and therefore love differently. For instance, the phrase "I love you" does not mean the same thing to both. Each partner in friendship has particular needs to be fulfilled and a particular way of expressing love.

7. Aidan Carr, Editorial, *HPR*, 69 (1970) p. 84

8. Christopher Kiesling, "Celibacy, Friendship, and Prayer," *Review for Religious*, 30 (1971) pp. 613-614

But the general tendency is to project one's own needs and ways of expressing love on the other and so to expect the other to feel and to act in the same way as oneself. When the friend does not respond in the expected way one is disappointed, hurt, and sometimes even roused to hostility.

Finally cultivating love is an ongoing process requiring time and demanding forbearance and patience. Love must pass through different stages of growth. It has to overcome many crises as it develops from stage to stage. One cannot be sure of success at any point because of the adverse influences which try to hinder or distort its growth. It calls for immense patience to persevere in something that appears to be a painful and mysterious process without being sure of reaching the goal. Even the goal is not certain because one cannot foretell what form a friendship will assume as time goes on, for people change and so do the circumstances in which they live.

The ascetical aspects just mentioned are common to all friendships. Celibate friendship has a further element of renunciation and flight. It has to keep aloof from the area of conjugal love. This highest form of inter-personal communication is excluded. The celibate vocation, by its very nature, does not allow that ultimate mutual donation and possession of partners which is the essence of married love. This is a poignant renunciation.

b. The true face of Christian renunciation.

1. The theology of happiness

Our faith tells us that God is found not only in pain but also in happiness⁹. If God can be found in the tragedies of life, why can He not be found in birthday parties, in picnics, in home-comings and above all in the thrill of love? We must say that God is found more in happiness than in sorrow because He is a good God. Therefore it is quite Christian to develop our emotions and to be genuinely happy. It is quite right to be happy and we are on the right path if we are. Our hope in the resurrection constantly reminds us to laugh rather than to weep.

9. Angelo Neophitos, "It's OK to Laugh", *Spiritual Life*, 19 (1973) pp. 48-49

The Church has warned us against a pain-oriented mentality and reminded us of the scriptural exhortation not to be worried about tomorrow's problems. Unfortunately sufficient heed has not been paid to this exhortation and as a consequence a Good-Friday-fixation has set in leaving little room for Easter Sunday. We should not develop a tendency to be continually in pain and privation. Pain and renunciation are no certificates for salvation.

Life is undoubtedly monotonous. At the beginning of the year students see another long train of lessons unappealing homework and irksome examinations ahead. Farmers see another year of drought, withering crops, scarcity and famine or of too much rain, floods and destruction. Workers see another year of tedious labour, of breaking stones under the scorching sun, of carrying mud all day and getting a pittance hardly enough to keep their body and soul together. Administrators see another year of budgets, papers, summaries of reports etc. The worker goes to work in the morning and returns fatigued and wasted in the evening. In rain or sunshine this is his continual lot. Yes, there is considerable tedium in life. It seems to be an endless cycle of reaching out towards something that cannot be attained. Often it is work without sufficient reward, sadness without sufficient joy, too much Good Friday and too little Easter Sunday. Hence every effort is needed if we are to move from grim work, sorrow and the Good-Friday-fixation to reward, joy and Easter Sunday,

The masochists and adorers of suffering will not allow the ordinary people, who are already oppressed with manifold suffering, to derive some happiness from the highest good in the world, namely love. They need to be reminded that Christianity, unlike Manicheism, is not a religion of pain, sorrow and renunciation. Christians have therefore every right to derive as much joy from life as possible and this not from the playthings and pets of children, such as dogs and cats, but from what counts most in life, namely from loving and being loved. Christians must be people who are fully alive through sensitivity to things that really matter. It is not just good to be happy. It is better, and it is a 'must' especially in the present world which is weighed down with so much grief. Happiness is where God is found,

2. The meaning of renunciation demanded by the NT

Affectionate love is not incompatible with the detachment required by the NT. Actually the NT teaches both warm love and detachment. The same Christ who wants us to renounce everything embraces the children warmly. Fr Richard Egenter calls our attention to the fact that apart from His renunciation of marriage there is no trace of dry asceticism in Our Lord's life. He accepts invitations to banquets and enjoys them. He maintains cordial relations with His disciples and they are asked not to fast as long as He is with them. He has a special love for three favourite apostles and most especially for John. He cultivates a cordial friendship with the family of Bethany. Christ thus experiences to the maximum the natural values of human life, particularly that of love, accepts them and, while enjoying them, prepares to leave them behind very soon¹⁰.

St John highlights the need of dying like the grain buried in the ground¹¹ and yet greets the recipients of his first letter with remarkable signs of endearment¹². The first letter of Peter encourages joy in suffering¹³ but at the same time urges deep fraternal feeling to be shown with a "kiss of love"¹⁴. St Paul who preaches against superfluities and himself possesses nothing¹⁵ loves his Christians with the exquisite tenderness of an affectionate father. Thus in the NT there is not even a hint of conflict between warm love and renunciation. Affectionate love and evangelical detachment can go together.

3 Renunciation as such has no value

The idea that the renunciatory value of consecrated celibacy is so great that it outweighs all others is certainly mischievous. Celibacy is good only to the extent that it enables a person to love others more. A celibacy practised at the expense

10. Richard Egenter, *loc. cit.*, p. 104

11. John 12: 24-25

12. 1 John 2, *passim*

13. 1 Peter 4: 12-13

14. 1 Peter 5: 14

15. 1 Tim. 6: 7-8; 2 Cor. 6: 10

of friendship does no honour to humanity at large; nay it causes irreparable losses of vital joy, courage and power to the human race.

Fr William Hague questions the validity of an asceticism that considers self-denial more important than freedom, constraint more important than love, self-doubt more important than confidence, and conformity more important than creativity¹⁶. People need self-actualization and not self-abnegation.

Fr John McNeill criticizes the customary advice that a person should seek religious perfection by accepting the sufferings that come from the non-fulfilment of legitimate psychological needs and from the curtailment of personality development. Such advice goes counter to the implications of St Irenaeus' unforgettable statement, "The glory of God is man fully alive" and is based more on Manicheism and Jansenism than on Christianity. A person's psychological and spiritual fulfilment can never be in conflict. The will of God for man is his true good, including the psychological good. Good spirituality and good psychology cannot oppose each other¹⁷. Any renunciation or ascetic practice that does not help one in the direction of greater love is like lines without a centre.

C. The sufficiency of the love of God

It is said that a celibate being totally dedicated to God, should find the love of God sufficient. What have we to say about this teaching which is usually known as *verticalism* because its votaries try to devote their entire affective capacity to God alone?

a. An evaluation of verticalism

A look at the history of spirituality and at the lives of celibates will convince us that many, present and past, have thought that their entire potential for affective commitment should exclusively be reserved for Christ and that others must be loved

16. William Hague, "The Identity Crisis in the Priesthood", *HPR*, 70 (1970) pp. 94-95

17. John McNeill, "The Christian Male Homosexual", III, *HPR*, 70 (1970) p. 829

with a spiritual and uncommitted love. These people grant that our neighbour must be loved with charity but are unwilling to love him with the affective involvement characteristic of personal friendship.¹⁸ By a deliberate renunciatory effort they try to avoid the thrilling, delightful and melting experience of human love. In other words they try to suppress any human love that is supported by mutual personal attraction.

A verticalism that has proper ideas about friendship between celibates is to be respected because God sometimes calls people to this way of life and it demands extraordinary abnegation. We have many examples of mystics from whom God required the renunciation of all affective relationship with others and the focussing of their total affection on Him alone. But, as Fr Paul Molinari reminds us, this is an extraordinary type of celibate vocation and therefore cannot be recommended to everybody as the ideal way of celibate living and loving.¹⁹

It is regrettable, however, that verticalism has very often entertained erroneous ideas about friendship in celibate life. It has usually suffered from negative moralizing about the place of friendship in celibacy. Frequently it has taken panic at the suggestion of any friendship, especially the heterosexual kind.

b. Friendship as a requisite for psychological fulfilment.

1. Love of God, generally insufficient for the psychological fulfilment of celibates

In order to grasp well the statement that love of God is generally not sufficient for the psychological fulfilment of celibates we must distinguish three kinds of human needs, namely, physical, psychological and spiritual. There are the physical needs such as hunger, thirst, the need to sleep, the need for oxygen, for elimination, for sex, and for many other functions that go to safeguard the well-being of the organism. In most cases the survival of the organism depends upon the satisfaction of these physical needs.

18. Paul Molinari, *loc. cit.*, p. 36

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37

Next come the psychological ones. Sr Rita Flaherty lists the five most commonly mentioned psychological needs namely, the need for affection, security, achievement, independence and status.²⁰ Tension arising from the non-fulfilment of these needs can lead, in some people to a disorganization of their personality.

The need for affection is the need to give and receive love. This is a very important need throughout life: The need for security implies the need to experience safety from the threats of a hostile world. It is not physical security that is intended here, but the security that is provided by love and trust. We all know that the presence of people who have concern for us gives us a feeling of greater security than any amount of physical protection amidst strangers. We feel a sense of insecurity when we know that there is nobody who cares for us or understands us in a threatening situation. The need for achievement is the need to feel that one has done something worth while. Persons who are deprived of affection or feel insecure cannot normally have an experience of achievement. The anxiety that arises from lack of affection is apt to compromise their efforts in such a way that they cannot achieve anything worth-while, or if they do achieve something, the achievement becomes personally unsatisfying. The need for status includes the desire to be a worthwhile person. Everyone has a basic desire to see himself as someone who matters. This too needs love, especially the experience of being loved.²¹ Thus we see that all the psychological needs are related in one way or another to the fundamental need for love and affection.

A final category of human needs is the spiritual. It involves the need to believe, love and worship an absolute Being who is infinitely good and powerful. It also includes the need to have a meaning for one's life. Existential neurosis results from the frustration and anxiety which come from the lack of a purpose in life.²²

20. Rita Flaherty, "Psychological Needs of Celibates - and Others", *Review for Religious*, 29 (1970) p. 663

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 664-665

22. *Ibid.*, p. 665

Now we say that normally love of God satisfies our spiritual needs but not our psychological or physical ones. Love of God can satisfy our psychological needs if it is joined to a mystical experience of God. But this is granted to very few and hence, generally, love of God is not sufficient for a person's psychological fulfilment.

Several recent authors are agreed on this point. Fr Richard Egenter considers it simplifying things far too much to think that one can substitute love of God for marriage, the most important act of dialogue between the sexes, and to feel sure that everything will work well.²³ Fr Albert Plé insists that for a celibate person love of God cannot be as natural and as passionate as love for another human being. As far as the heart is concerned something will always be missing. Even in ideal situations the integration of the affectivity of the person who is consecrated by celibacy would take a long time. In other words, unless favoured with the special grace of mystical experience such a person would feel the constant pinch of the deprivation of affection.²⁴ Only a suitable friendship makes up for this want. According to José de Vinck, many celibate men and women simply cannot be themselves and cannot function effectively for the Church and society unless their emotional need for love is satisfied to a certain extent. Those who claim that love of God alone is enough for the celibate are mostly beyond the canonical age, or cold and inexperienced in the art of loving, or thoroughly brainwashed by false propaganda against friendship, or afraid of persons of the other sex.²⁵ These people are not the best judges of celibacy and friendship.

2. The need of human love for celibates

Consecrated celibacy does not destroy the personal nature of men and women. It is wrong to believe that celibates have renounced their need for love or that it has disappeared from

23. Richard Egenter, *loc. cit.*, p. 97

24. Albert Plé, "Celibacy and Emotional life." *The Clergy Review*, 55 (1970) pp. 38-40

25. José de Vinck, *The virtue of Sex*, St. Meinard, Ind., 1970, n. 22.

them just because they happen to be celibates. This need has to be satisfied by mature friendship.

Many modern authors speak in the same strain. Fr Richard McCormick emphasizes the fact that consecrated celibacy does not and cannot forgo human love. What a celibate renounces is only the intimacy of marriage, conjugal love and the kind of companionship and fulfilment typical of marriage and family life. Human love is more comprehensive than conjugal love. It is not fundamentally genital-sexual but personal: a communion between persons. The self-donation implied in love does not necessarily involve physical donation of self in sexual intercourse. Consecrated celibacy should not be pictured as a commitment to God so total that there is nothing left for anyone else.²⁶ While celibacy gives up conjugal love and its implications it does not give up the love that is human friendship.

A celibacy which attempts to frustrate or stultify anything good in human nature is considered defective by Fr Jean-Pierre Schaller.²⁷ Virtue is not opposed to perfect health, the greatest efficiency and the highest happiness. A sound spirituality must base itself on a sound emotional life. Hence strangling the instincts and suppressing good impulses can never be a part of Christian spirituality. Virtue consists not in eliminating emotions but integrating as many of them as possible. A spirituality that does not strive to integrate all the forces of man into a unity but professes to condemn them is a counterfeit spirituality. It will never foster the virtues that make life beautiful and prepare a better future for the human race. Instead it will suffocate people to psychological death.

One of the purposes of Christianity, as Fr Martin McNamara sees it, is to bring to perfection man's natural abilities, drives and aspirations. To fail to recognize this is to falsify the Christian message. Christianity is authentic when it activates human nature and brings the forces implanted in it by God to

26. Richard McCormick, "Psychosexual development in Religious life," *Review for Religious* 23 (1964) pp. 737-738

27. Jean-Pierre Schaller, *Our Emotions and the Moral Act*, Staten Island, N. Y., 1968, pp. 197-198

fruition.²⁸ Fr Thomas Dubay reiterates that consecration does not free celibates from the laws of human nature. Deeply entrenched in the human make-up is the need to receive affection. Hence they will be dissatisfied until love is forthcoming.²⁹ Fr Albert Plé has no hesitation in reminding us that a celibate has not only a mind but also a heart. If the heart has to live it has to be nourished by human relationships and human love. This has been confirmed by experimental psychology which throws into sharp relief the importance of love from childhood onwards. The child needs the love of its mother or a mother substitute to reach an awareness of self.³⁰

Fr Albert Jonsen denounces the dualism between the natural and supernatural which has been responsible for serious misunderstanding regarding celibacy and friendship. This dualism implies that celibacy is an other-worldly value and can be practised outside the realm of human affectivity. But in point of fact it is as much a human moral stance with regard to human sexuality as marriage is, and can be opted and lived out with precisely the same human resources and responsibility as marriage.³¹

Fr Martin Pable does not understand why so much fuss should be made over the issue of friendship in the life of celibates. Very few issues are charged with so much emotion. He wonders what lay people would think if they came to know what row is made over a thing so natural and normal as friendship.³²

There is nothing more important for man than love. Every human being, including the celibate, needs that highest form of love which is friendship. To satisfy the need to love and to be loved is part of that pursuit of happiness in which we all are engaged.

28. Martin McNamara, "Christianity a Religion of Realism", *Doctrine and Life*, 20 (1970) p. 43

29. Thomas Dubay, *art. cit.*, p. 203

30. Albert Plé, *art. cit.*, p. 34

31. Albert Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics*, Washington, 1968, pp. 202-203

32. Martin Pable, "Development of the Person in Seminaries," *HPR*, 68 (1968) p. 595.

c. The need of human love, a perfection

It has to be stressed that the deeply felt need of celibates for love is in no way an imperfection. No celibate need be apologetic about it, for as Fr Dubay suggests, the deeper it is, the nobler the person.³³ Normally it is the person who is emotionally subnormal that does not feel this need. We may make a comparison with the physical need of hunger. It is not a perfection not to feel appetite for food. In a similar way, it is not a perfection not to feel the need for love. A hunger for genuine affection indicates personal well-being.

Jean Guittou defines being as that which should be exchanged.³⁴ This is most true of human beings. Man is a being who should be exchanged between loving and being loved. There is nothing more vital for man than love, which like death is a phenomenon that affects the totality of the human being. The fear arising from our thoughts of death results from the radical isolation which death implies. Love on the contrary, is the privileged ground of security resulting from our encounter with another as a person³⁵.

The need for human love is nothing less than the reflection of the companionship existing in the Holy Trinity. After He had created man, God said "It is not good that the man is alone".³⁶ That man has been created with a need for companionship flows directly from the fact that he is an image of God. No divine person lives solitarily. The three divine persons live, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit within one God in the closest possible communion.

D. The necessity of separation from the world

It is maintained that consecrated celibates are people who have left the world in order to serve God and secure their eternal salvation. Therefore they are not expected to mix in mundane affairs such as human love. To this objection there is

33. Thomas Dubay, *art. cit.*, p. 210.

34. Jean Guittou, *Human Love*, Chicago, 1966, p. 82.

35. A. Jeanniere, *The Anthropology of Sex*, New York, 1967, p. 31.

36. Gen. 2: 18.

the answer that consecrated celibates are not people who have left the world. They are people who are also meant for the world. No Christian, much less a consecrated celibate, may flee the world leaving it to the powers of darkness. The fundamental attitude of the Christian towards the world should be one of hope and optimism, not flight or denigration.

Celibate life is not opposed to involvement and participation in the affairs of the world. Today we do not make a strict separation between the natural and the supernatural world since there is actually only one reality, the world redeemed by Christ. Since God is at the very centre of reality we are really building up the kingdom of God by building a better world for men. By being concerned about our neighbour, by helping him to attain fulfilment, we love him supernaturally and preach the Good News to him. By encountering our brother or sister, by entering into dialogue with others we encounter God.

At present the tendency is to stress more the immanence of God in the things of the world than His transcendence over them. There is a general conviction that promotion of earthly values and of the temporal order can lead to God. The priests and religious of today are eager to encounter God in and through human values for they believe in the inherent goodness of created things. Far from disdaining them, they wish to use these created things constructively as a medium of loving encounter with God.

In the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* the pronouncement on earthly values is clearly a positive one. We are exhorted to have a great respect for them. The Christian message does not oppose what is temporal to what is eternal. What it tries to do is to integrate the temporal with the eternal. The Christian should have a profound respect for such earthly values in their true perspective and keep them directed to what is eternal. This means that he should not place his ultimate happiness in them. He must use them as intermediate goals or as filling stations on the way to God. This is the meaning of integrating the temporal with the eternal.

To conclude, human values, far from being a threat to the grace of God, are the ground in which it thrives. These values are part of God's plan of salvation. Separation from the

world should not entail any downgrading of human love and friendship.

E. The danger of particular friendship

Another objection concerns the harm that may be done to community life if particular friendships are encouraged. We must distinguish particular friendships from false and dangerous ones. The past tendency to identify every particular friendship, with false and dangerous friendship is, to say the least, unfortunate.³⁷ Fr McNaspy is of the opinion that the use of the phrase "particular friendship" in its antiquated sense of "dangerous friendship" should be given a quiet and dignified, but immediate, burial.³⁸

Every friendship is by its very nature particular, for it is absurd to suggest that a person is equally attracted to everyone. For evident reasons every celibate must have a personal concern for his fellowmen. But he can never love all of them in the same way.

Fr Fergal O'Connor sees great benefits in particular friendships. If community life has any meaning at all it should be one in which the members live together in love and if possible in the highest form of love which is friendship. A community in which friendships are cultivated will be a happy one because every member will have someone to whom to turn as a genuine friend.³⁹

F. The need of equal love for all

A final objection brought forward against friendship in celibate life centres on the obligation of celibates to love all men and not some. As Fr Nicholas Predovich points out, the commitment of a celibate to love all does not mean an obligation to love everybody in exactly the same way. Such an explanation would be a mockery of love, for various reasons. First of all

37. Richard McCormick, *art. cit.*, p. 738.

38. C. J. McNaspy, *Change not Changes*, New York, 1968, pp. 62-63.

39. Fergal O'Connor, "Sexuality, Chastity and Celibacy" *Doctrine and Life*, 18 (1968) p. 140.

equal love is not possible with everyone. It is good to note that although the celibate is committed to universal love, the commitment is made within the framework of human nature. As human beings celibates have the same human feelings, emotions, and affections as others. Secondly to attempt to love all equally would amount to ignoring each person's uniqueness and the individuality and this is morally evil. Thirdly, an emotionless love, given to all in exactly the same way is really no love at all.⁴⁰ It is a delusion to suppose that we can feel the same joyous love for all men, not only seeking to be all things to them all but actually being so, without experiencing a stronger personal attraction to some person or other. Grace, as we know, builds on nature and charity which proceeds from grace cannot ignore the natural sympathies and the formation of natural predilections and attachments.⁴¹

Those who still entertain some doubt about the legitimacy of loving people in different degrees have only to look at the example of Our Lord. He did not love everybody equally. He loved His mother more than anyone else. He showed a preference for His three favourite disciples and especially for His beloved John. His special love for the family of Bethany is well known. Unless we want to be more Christian than Christ Himself we have to admit that it is not a perfection to love all equally.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made here to answer some of the objections usually levelled against friendship in consecrated celibate life. We hope we have succeeded in pulling down some of the prejudices against friendship between celibates. In a world such as ours that is pluralistic and sceptical as never before the sole intelligible sign of authentic celibacy is a life that is not less but more fully human. Not to have loved is not to have lived at all.

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40. Nicholas Predovich, *The Challenge of "Radical" Renewal*, Staten Island, N. Y., p. 82.

41. Richard Egenter, *art. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

A Challenge for Priests: What Sisters Expect of Them

As I was meditating on what would be a most suitable introduction to this article, I was struck by the following thought; 'A priest ought to be a living sign of God's love for man'. I immediately began to think of the many priests whom I have met during my lifetime, and as I knelt in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, I tried to put each priest there, in front of the Host, and I asked myself 'Does he really fit? Is he really another Christ? A reflection of the Gospel message?' As each one came before my mind, I found that some priests did fit, but unfortunately, others did not quite make the grade. Perhaps the sisters' ideas of what a priest ought to be are more concerned with their external behaviour and attitude, and therefore may not justify a priest's interior dispositions. However, most of us sisters do expect to see and to meet Christ in His priests, for are they not *alteri Christi* - 'other Christs'? We expect much of them, because they are called by God to "great things" for Him, and hence we want to see in them a reflection of Christ's limitless goodness, Christ's tender mercy, Christ's patient understanding, Christ's mature manliness, Christ's frank openness.

Reflecting on Christ's life, we see that there was nothing weak and 'flabby' about Him, He knew very well how to get what He wanted, when He saw it was for someone's good. He knew how to bring the best out of people; He knew how to be firm and even severe when the occasion called for this. He could bring great sinners to a humble repentance; He was able to open men's eyes to their own foolishness: 'Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man', 'Lord, I am not worthy', 'I have sinned in betraying the blood of an innocent man'.

Consider the sublime dignity of a priest - a man set apart - as the reflection of Christ to the world. When a priest prays he

is praying in, with and for Christ. Therefore, he must be a man of intense prayer, of deep recollection. His prayer-life must not be an exterior facade, but rather a dynamic force that can penetrate the hardest of hearts, a living proof of what lies within. His whole manner, speech and attitude should become transformed, 'lifted up' as it were into 'Christ-likeness.' Christ often tried to slip away from the crowd to spend some time alone with His Father, in prayer: 'He went out into the hills to pray: and all night he continued in prayer', again 'He departed and went to a lonely place'.

A priest must be ready to give himself to others, and therefore when he is going around 'doing good': visiting the sick, the poor, the sad, the lonely, the good, the bad, the weary, the forsaken, he is walking in Christ's footsteps treading the same path He trod some two thousand years ago. May be if a priest treads hard enough, he will be able to feel the warmth of Christ's footprint, there may even be blood in it. A priest, an Apostle of Christ, has to walk along the path that leads to Calvary. He will surely find many splinters from the Cross as he goes his daily rounds, visits and journeys. But we sisters expect a priest to be up and doing, completely occupied with the Lord's work, courageously moving onward in the footsteps of the Master.

Furthermore, sisters expect a priest to be a man of his word, to be a 'manly' man, a man of justice, peace and unbounded charity. Are priests today really just? Isn't there a loop-hole somewhere? Are they men of strong convictions? Apostles of the invincible and undaunted Christ, whose virtues of justice and love shone out with a magnificent brilliance, penetrating the blinding darkness of his time? What about Christ's charity? Are our priests saturated with that infinite tenderness of the Master? With Christ's unflinching manliness? Do our priests stick to their convictions in spite of opposition or do they waver in moments of weakness, turning right and left, according as the wind blows? Christ was not like that. For Him, when it was 'yes', it was 'yes', and when it was 'no' it was 'no'.

Another point worth bringing forward is that when a priest prepares a homily or a talk, especially for sisters, it would be

good to hear something worth-while, something uplifting. If a priest is holy and Christ-like, there will be no problem here. He will be able to set his listeners on fire with Christ's love, Christ's zeal, Christ's fervour.

We expect a priest to be utterly selfless. A selfish priest can never radiate Christ: he can only be an unsavoury image of meanness and immaturity.

To conclude, can it be said that perhaps the sisters' expectations of priests are pitched too high – being meant more for God than for a man. But are we sisters expecting too much of our priests? No, the saints who have gone before us, have been humans like ourselves. There have been, and there are, even today, saints – saints in the making – other Peters, Johns, and Pauls, who are giving themselves with untiring zeal and generosity in complete self-dedication, to Christ and His Church. We need priests of courage, men of steel, men of determination, who are capable and ready to meet the needs of our modern times and to accept the innumerable challenges of our day.

May the Holy Spirit fill the hearts of all His priests with His burning love and zeal. May He stir up a mighty flame of generous love in the hearts of many young men today, and make them offer themselves without flinching to Christ and to the spread of His Kingdom. Above all, may all priests be penetrated with the sublime dignity of their royal priesthood: a priest: a man of God: another Christ: a living sign of God's love for man.

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Dolores Marston

Book Review

RELATIVITY OF THE NATURAL LAW

-by Felix Podimattam, O. F. M. Cap.,
St Joseph's Theological College,
Kotagiri, 1970,
pp. i - xvi + 172.

Many pious souls (may their tribe increase!) are today fiercely perturbed, by the sad sight of their dear, old natural law fighting desperately in its seemingly last ditches. Many even believe that the old ailing patient, lying etherised on the modern philosopher's none too comfortable operating table, has already given up the ghost! In fact there is too much confusion reigning in theological and philosophical circles about the exact nature and contents of the natural law. It is in this context that Rev. Dr Podimattam comes forward with a really bold thesis on the "Relativity of the Natural Law". But when I am reminded that his thesis was prepared and successfully defended in a Roman ecclesiastical university, I must call his venture doubly bold.

The author warns us at the outset not to confuse relativity and relativism. Relativism admits nothing that is absolute, while relativity admits some absolutes, though not too many. Natural law, according to him, is a general demand of right reason rather than a norm of particular action. In other words, it is not a code of rules. Right reason is connected with good will. A good will is one that is effectively free. He also observes that natural law is really the demand of the reason of wise men. He has not failed to stress the role of connaturality (the old *synderesis*) in the perception of natural laws.

We come next to the essence of what the author calls the relativity of natural law. Moral truth or value is permanent and absolute in its formal aspect. But this absolute and permanent truth is perceived by us in a relative manner. A moral truth

can take on different avatars, just as man appears in the different forms of woman, child, youth, etc. A change in life situations calls for a change in the avatar or formulation of a moral truth. But these differing avatars have their range or validity and within that range they are absolute.

We have no space here to give even a brief summary of the author's observations on the various aspects of this problem. His remarks on the theology of dissent, the nature and limits of ecclesiastical magisterium and the presently raging problem of papal infallibility deserve special mention.

Dr Podimattam's analysis of the physicalist, biologicistic and legalistic attitude towards natural law may not have much of originality in it, but it deserves to be in the book at least for completeness' sake. His treatment of the limitations of human freedom (sociological and psychological), the nature of moral knowledge etc. is largely based on the profound insights of modern sociology, psycho-analysis and existential phenomenology.

But the really original and significant contribution that the author makes towards the elucidation of natural law concepts, is contained in the final and fourth chapter of the book. The old writers on moral theology used to make a distinction between acts of man and human acts. In their view all human acts are moral. But our author here brings in a subtler distinction, namely the one between human acts and moral acts. It is in this chapter again that he introduces the important notion of what is called the support of a moral value. It is his contention that the support of a moral value is always a human act and not an object. The notion seems to be really a rich and fruitful one for the understanding and solution of many difficult moral problems. The author, to the great consolation of many conservative theologians, does not hesitate to accept the proposition that some human acts are intrinsically evil. But I don't think that consolation to be long lasting, as the author's explanations may disconcert many of them.

In the last section of his book, Dr Podimattam discusses the very foundations of two justly famous moral principles. The first of these relate to ends and means. Catholic moral theology

teaches us that ends cannot justify means. Now Dr Podimattam clearly points out instances where the principle cannot be applied. The other famous principle which he boldly calls redundant is the principle of the double effect. And to be frank his arguments do seem to hold water!

As I mentioned earlier, Dr Podimattam's conclusions are outstandingly bold and original. A decade ago some of them would have been condemned as more or less heretical. (Of course Dr Podimattam is careful to add that his views are only probable and tentative. This shows the relativity of his own book!) The author has already made an impression in theological circles in India as someone who really knows what he is talking about when discussing, teaching, or treating questions of moral theology. We should all be really proud of this nascent native intellect in the sphere of modern moral theology.

And in writing that final sentence I seem to have touched the core of the author's achievement as well as the defects of his approach. Dr Podimattam is a moral theologian and a capable one at that. But a solid theology must have a firm philosophical foundation. And philosophy seems to be the author's Achilles' heel—at least as far as the present book is concerned. His thesis was prepared under the guidance of a famous moral theologian, I mean, Fr Häring. But I have always felt that Fr Häring's philosophical positions are somewhat fragile or defective. Nor is the Academia Alfonsiana — where the author studied — a very congenial home for original philosophical speculation. Dr Podimattam's original sin as moral theologian must therefore be an inheritance from these two sources. If space permitted I could point out and discuss many different instances where Dr Podimattam betrays his weakness when discussing philosophical questions. Here I must perforce be content with only a few hints. 1) The author claims that his approach is historical and phenomenological. But there is precious little of phenomenology in this book. 2) There is not much love lost between him and metaphysics. I would here only point out that a serious moral theologian can ignore metaphysics only at his peril. 3) His contention that freedom is the power to do good is a deplorable heritage from Fr Häring. Does the author seriously maintain that we are not responsible for our evil actions. For if his position is

correct evil actions cannot be free and hence we cannot be responsible for them. 4) This reviewer finds it extremely difficult to agree with the author when he points out that papal infallibility refers to the certainty of doctrine rather than to its truth. I, for one, am not at all interested in a doctrine which, however certain it is, is not at the same time true. There are doctrines that are certainly false. 5) The author points out that moral evil consists in violating a right. What about violation of divine commandments? What about neglect of duties? 6) His observation that right reason is contained in the example of wise men is too empirical a norm for determining the morality of an act. 7) He believes that an effectively free will is good. Not necessarily.

One or two final remarks before concluding. The author gives a really good and exhaustive bibliography at the end of the book. But in the body of the book most of his quotations are taken from third-rate theologians. But then of course anyone can retort by asking who the first-rate theologians are. The author could have relied more on modern European theologians if he wanted, for he knows his German and French very well to benefit from them. And after carefully reading the book, one is forced to ask the question: Where in this book does moral relativism end and where does moral relativity emerge? A difficult question indeed, but one which it is worthwhile asking and if possible, answering also.

P. T. Chacko

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